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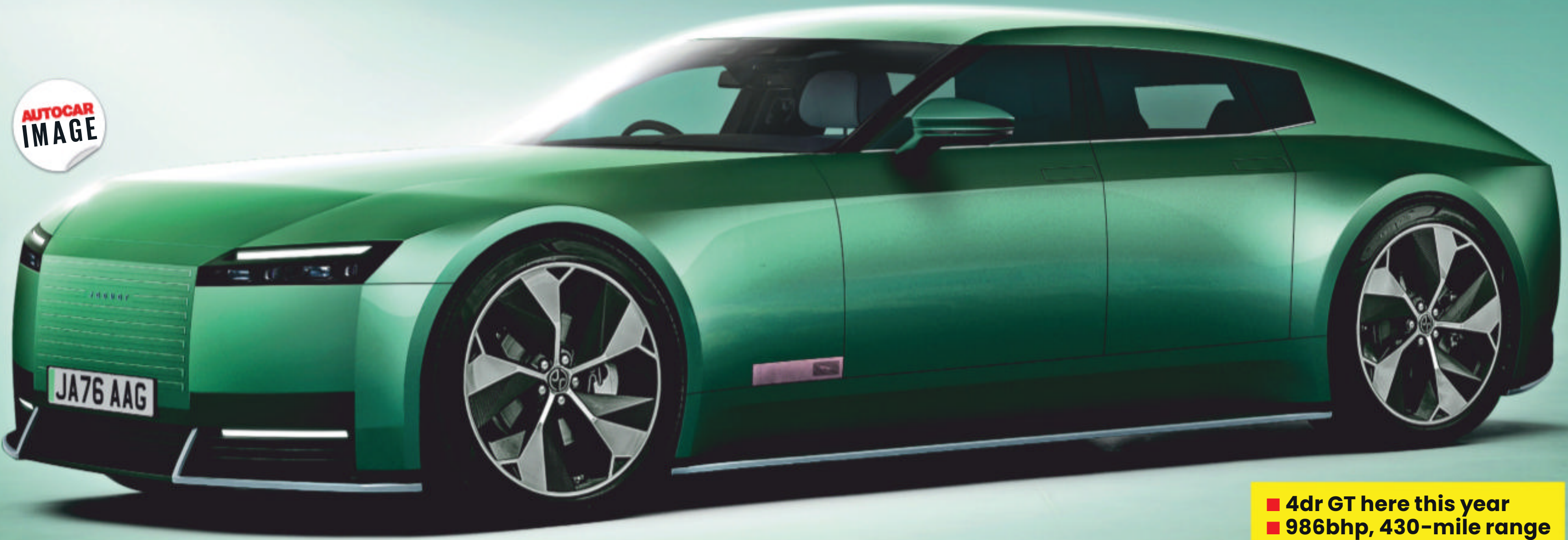

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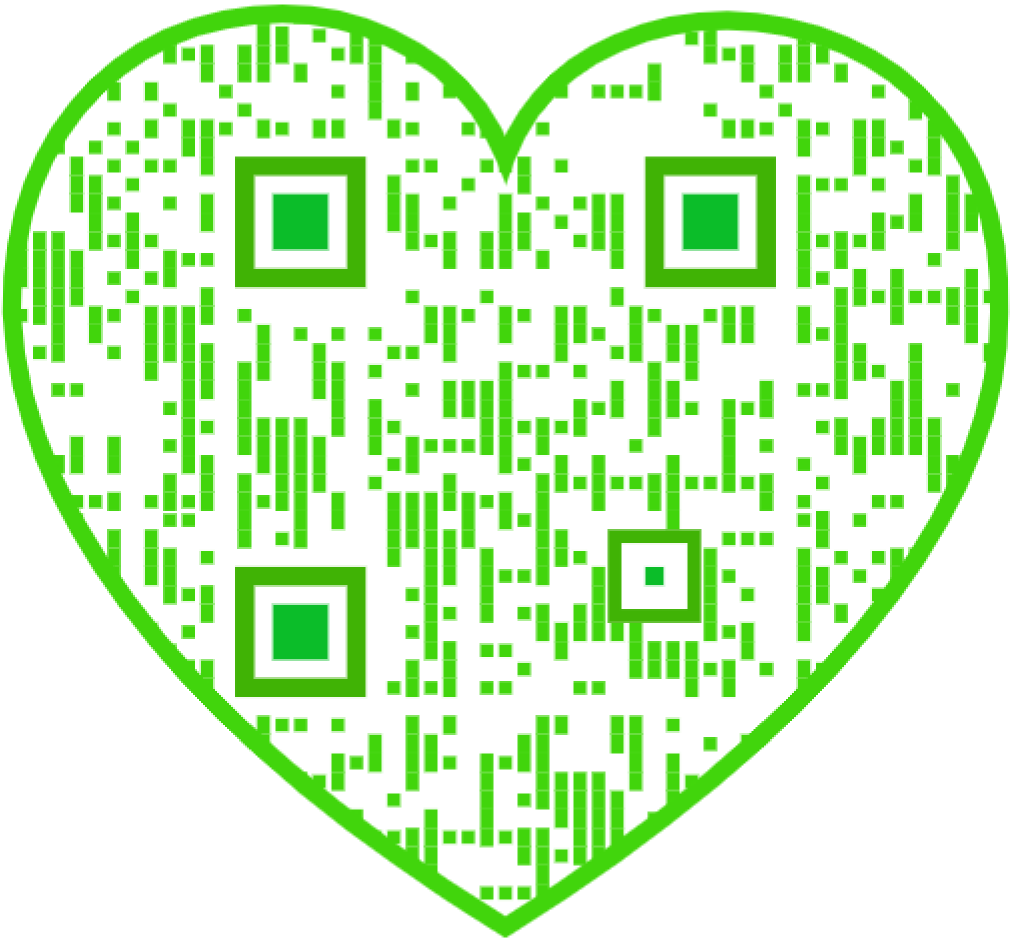

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COMMENT

JAGUAR'S REBRAND: THE INSIDE STORY, BY ITS BOSS

It's a big week at Autocar HQ when we've had the chance to talk exclusively in person with Jaguar's global boss, Rawdon Glover. Editor Mark Tisshaw sat down with him over an afternoon and you can read the results of that conversation over the next six pages.

Almost everyone has an opinion on how Jaguar's rebrand played out, but one thing upset the purists most of all: that in its new branding, new positioning and new look, Jaguar had abandoned its diehard fans, the very people who had built the brand into what it was.

Jaguar's global boss was quick to dispel that notion in our chat. Glover, who is a trustee of the Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust because he "really wanted to understand [Jaguar's] history", told us that it was never the intention to convey the idea that Jaguar doesn't care about current customers.

"I can understand how that has been interpreted [that way] because Jaguar needs to attract a new audience," he said. "But that doesn't mean we're not interested in our current audience. Quite the opposite. [We] want to take as many of that current audience on that journey with us as possible. We probably could have done a better job in explaining [that]."

Such a tone of humility was missing from the initial rebrand and provides reassurance and hope for Jaguar's future.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

EV G-Wagen and its tricks

Four motors deliver 579bhp, extreme agility and unique tricks. Matt Prior takes it on and off road to show what it's capable of.

Peugeot designers go mad

The firm's design house has shown three different takes on its 504. They are all outrageous. Full pictures on our Instagram page.

UK's best dead car firms

From Allard to Wolseley – we look back at our favourite deceased car marques from Britain. See how many you know.

Autocar (ISSN 1355-8293 USPS 25-185) is published weekly by Haymarket Media Group, Bridge House, 69 London Road, Twickenham, TW1 3SP, United Kingdom; haymarket.com; tel +44 (0)20 8267 5000

The US annual subscription price is $190.00. Airfreight and mailing in the US by agent named World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. US postmaster: Send address changes to Autocar, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc, 150-15, 183rd Street, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at the above address. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

Autocar magazine is also published in Estonia, Greece, India, Japan, Latvia, Korea and Thailand.

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GOT A STORY Email our news editor
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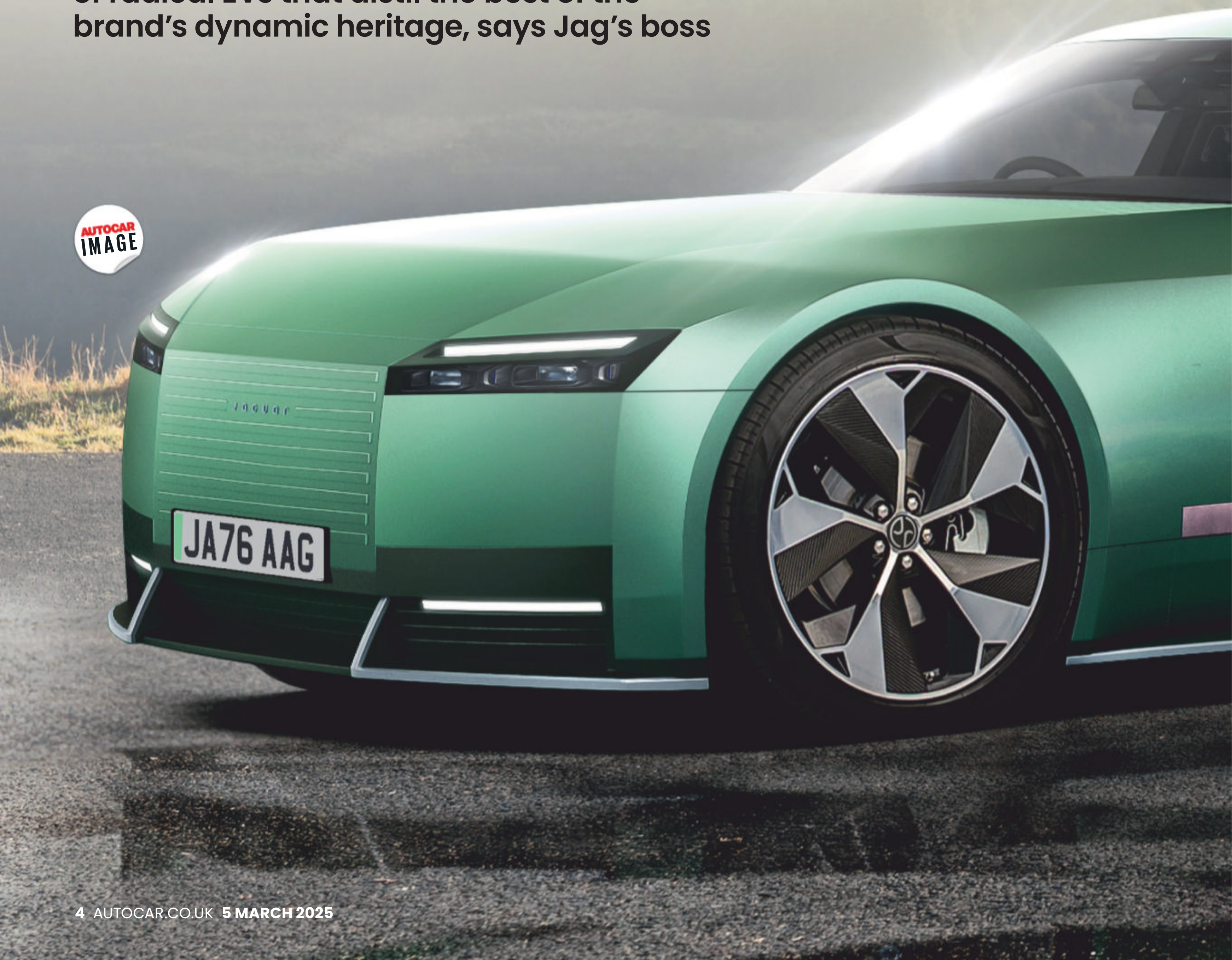
JAG FORGES NEW ERA WITH 'EMOTIONAL' 986BHP ELECTRIC GT

Striking-looking GT will kick off a series of radical EVs that distil the best of the brand's dynamic heritage, says Jag's boss



The electric four-door GT that will spearhead an all-new era for Jaguar will be revealed at the end of the year and go into production in the middle of 2026.

In an exclusive meeting with Autocar at Jaguar's Gaydon headquarters, Jaguar boss Rawdon Glover said in a wide-ranging interview that the 986bhp GT is "right in the midst" of prototype testing on public roads, at JLR's Gaydon proving ground and in the Arctic Circle as it gears up for launch.

Glover said the focus so far has been on the new brand and the design for Jaguar but it will soon enter "a very different phase" where the company will talk more about the engineering, architecture and dynamics of the car.

He expects to win over some of the more dissenting voices about the new Jaguar at this point as the brand looks to capture the essence of the best Jaguars from history in the way the new GT drives.

To date, development has been "the complete opposite of how everything used to work", according to Glover, with total unity between design and engineering to achieve such an extreme and radically different look, instead of designing around a platform or vice versa.

Given the dramatic styling, proportions and sharp angles of the new Jaguars, as previewed by the Type 00 concept, careful consideration has been given to, for instance, crash testing and the aerodynamic performance needed to achieve a targeted 430 miles of range for the four-door GT in its most efficient form.

"We've got some incredibly talented engineers who took that challenge on," said Glover. "Their job is to maintain the design integrity and come up with something that meets all of the current stipulations for a vehicle - homologation, safety, whatever else - and to do so in a way that brings all of the very best of what a Jaguar should be as a driving car."

On the way the car drives, Glover said the chassis team took the greatest Jaguars of all time, "spent days driving the vehicles" and then looked at "what is it about them that is unique and is absolutely inherently Jaguar, and what can we take from this?".

The goal is not to create sports cars, but rather cars "you can drive confidently at pace for extended periods and still come out feeling great".

Glover has driven the range-topping 986bhp version of the new GT at Gaydon at speeds of up to 160mph and it was the "most fun I've had" in his two-year tenure as Jaguar boss.

"It was stunning in terms of its speed, its acceleration, its performance, but also how it delivered the power with a real sense of character," he said. "The chassis team are really excited about the possibilities of the vehicle."

The new GT will use electric motors and a battery pack common to other JLR models as "economically, there's no way around that", said Glover. "But I think the interesting tech and engineering stories are how we've actually engineered the vehicle and how we have been able to retain the looks while meeting crash and aero requirements."

As for how the design of the production car will compare with the Type 00 concept, people will "not ▶

"The new GT is stunning in how it delivers the power with a real sense of character"

“We must make a car that’s desirable and elicits an emotional reaction”

◂ be left scratching their heads” and “there is strong lineage” between the pair so that “people will not be disappointed”.

The proportions, long bonnet, front face and rear-light graphic of the Type 00 are particular areas that will carry over to production.

Glover said: “We did an analysis of the two side by side and we went through the cars internally and externally. I came out of that meeting thinking there are even more similarities between the two than actually when I came in.”

On the interior, Glover said Jaguar won’t be “bombarding the driver with technology”.

“Most importantly, it’s got to be an amazing place to be in. The technology is there when you need it,” he said. “Jaguar is not going to win by having the best technology. That’s not a strategy.

“It’s a bit like the great watchmakers. Yes, there’s innovation in there but they don’t win by having tech. I think there’s an analogy there in terms of design, craftsmanship and engineering, and how things drive, rather than pure tech. I think we’ll probably leave that for the Chinese [car makers].”

Despite the likes of Aston Martin, Bentley, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche and Volvo all rowing back on EV plans, Glover said “there is no flexibility” in the Jaguar plan to do anything other than full EVs. All new Jaguars will be built on the EV-bespoke Jaguar Electric Architecture (JEA), with no future compatibility for hybrids.

“We made the decision back in 2021 to have an electric architecture dedicated to us,” said Glover. “There isn’t the opportunity to put a V8 into it or something else. We’re committed to being electric.”

Glover believes “EV will be the right platform for us and the powertrain of choice” in the industry long term. The JEA will take Jaguar deep into the 2030s and “a lot of things will change” by then around reactions to range and charging, said Glover. “Advancements in technology and infrastructure are going to make a big difference.”

EV design will also get more interesting to help boost their appeal, believes Glover. Most of today’s EVs are designed to deliver range by featuring short bonnets, small wheels and cab-forward proportions and “you end up with perhaps not the most exciting or emotionally engaging” cars.

“Probably more than anything, what we need to do is produce a vehicle that people think is a great car that I really want to own from a brand that I like. The powertrain should be a secondary thing,” he said.

The GT will be followed by at least two more models, which are understood to be a large luxury saloon and an SUV. All will have the same design language and “exuberant” proportions and be built at Solihull.

Glover said Jaguar has chosen to launch the GT first “as it is going to position the brand most clearly” in its new upmarket home and it is closest to the Type 00 concept that Jaguar has used to preview the brand.

Glover said: “The GT’s job is to say: Jaguar is here and can command a price point in excess of £100,000, because the product concept and the brand is capable of doing that.

“The other vehicles do different things in terms of accessing a slightly broader audience, slightly greater volume, or whatever else. They have different roles.”

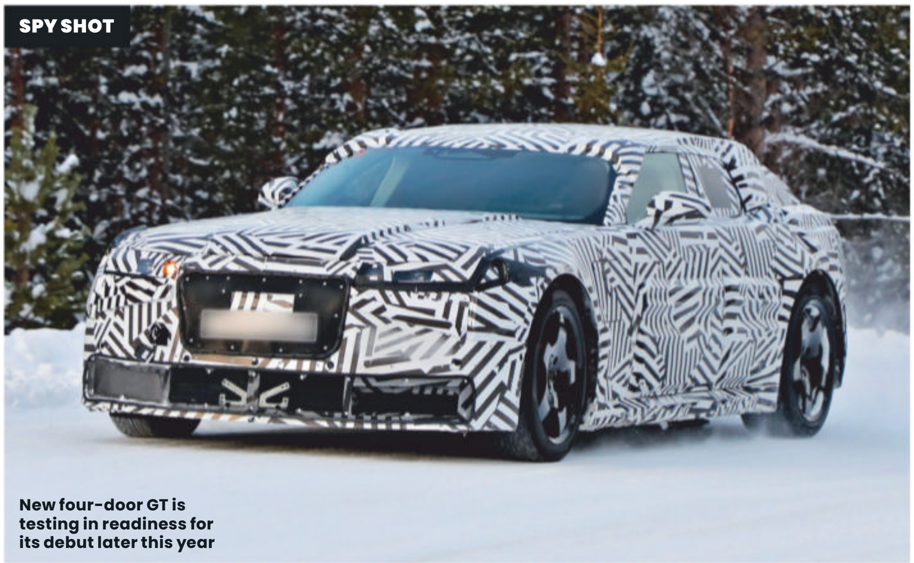
The starting price for the new range of models will be around £100,000 and Glover said the new Jaguars are unlikely to be the only car on a customer’s driveway.

“In that context, it will be a case of ‘what car do I want for the trip I’m making today?’. Our most important job is to make a car that’s desirable, resonates with people and elicits an emotional reaction. Nobody needs a £100,000 car. You’ve got to want one,” he added.

The £100,000 price will not be lowered over time, as it “is not the strategy to go in at a price point and stretch the brand down. If you get a really, really compelling proposition with a uniquely crafted and designed vehicle, our price points are quite attainable.”

Order books for the GT will open when it is unveiled and the car will go on a preview tour to potential customers. This will be a “very, very bespoke experience” and targeted at people who have expressed an interest in the concept car.

MARK TISSHAW



New four-door GT is testing in readiness for its debut later this year

JAGUAR’S BOSS REVEALS WHY *THAT* REBRAND WAS SO VITAL

Rawdon Glover says you can never remind people enough about why Jaguar had to change.

So, from the top, it was due to the fact that Jaguar was “at a pivotal point in its history”, with all its products and platforms coming to the end of the road. While the BMW-rivalling era of Jaguars had been critically well received, they had not done well in the marketplace, so “economically, the Jaguar model didn’t make sense”.

Glover said “going south” with Jaguar’s pricing was “not an option” so “instead, partly informed by our history, [we decided] actually we should take Jaguar upmarket.

“We should take Jaguar back to a positioning of when it was much more successful in the marketplace and really try and restore that real lustre that the brand definitely had, and we definitely see.

“That’s why the brand still has such a strong affinity. But the interesting thing about Jaguar is most of the affinity tends to be with what we’ve done historically, not what

we've been doing recently."

The decision was taken to move the products upmarket and, with a firm eye on future legislation, to make them all-electric too. In doing both those things, said Glover, "you need to take the brand with you", hence the rebranding of Jaguar alongside the radically different cars and powertrains.

However good the new cars might be, Glover said that in doubling the price of the new Jaguars, "you need to make sure the brand can actually carry it. You need to look at how you manage the brand and all of the experiences associated with that brand."

Before that, said Glover, an "elegant sunset" for winding down the existing Jaguar range is ongoing. While some models are on sale in other global markets, Jaguar no longer has a new car retail presence in the UK.

"There's no real playbook for that, because nobody else has done it before," he said. "It's definitely been a really interesting challenge to take that on. We're quite a long way through it. We will have this period now of 'breathing space' to really build the [new] brand, the awareness, the interest, before we actually start taking orders further down the track."

While "there are times in a brand's life when, particularly if it's really successful, you tweak with tiny, little incremental changes, and that's entirely appropriate", something more drastic was needed for Jaguar because it was not in that position.

Renewing a line-up of BMW rivals like F-Pace "didn't make sense"

The move towards EVs and "the increasing threat from Chinese brands" meant a small step would not be appropriate.

Glover said: "We needed to make one really big step, because the environment is changing. The competitive set is changing. We think client habits are changing. Across the board, it wasn't the time for Jaguar to take a little tentative step, which is probably what caught some people off guard in terms of it being a really big step for Jaguar.

"But the 'why' is really important for me, because ▶

MAX EDLESTON

Type 00 concept sets the template for the new GT and cars that will follow it

◀ when you take in all of those contextual factors, it demands a change of that magnitude.”

When that change was first revealed to the world, initially as a rebranding in November and then with the unveiling of the Type 00 concept car a month later, Glover was acutely aware that reaction was at best mixed. (“Some commentators completely got it. Others haven't. Similarly, some enthusiast groups have got it and others haven't and we need to take them on that journey.”) But he is unwavering about why this needed to be done.

“The team is absolutely unflinching on this: what it's going to take for Jaguar to succeed and the way that we're going to do it,” he said. “The design teams, the engineering teams – everybody's been involved in getting it this far.”

Returning to enthusiasts, Glover is frustrated that “messages get filtered” and about the sentiment that this new Jaguar is not for those who have loved and bought into the brand to date.

“One example being: 'we are leaving our customers behind; we don't care about our current customers'. That came from some of the negative commentary. But that was never the intention,” he said.

“I can understand how that has been interpreted, because we're basically saying Jaguar needs to attract a new audience. But that doesn't mean to say we're not interested in our current audience. Quite the opposite. [We] want to take as many of that current audience on that journey with us as possible.

“We probably could have done a better job in just laying that out and explaining the narrative about why we were making the change, why the change was so dramatic. I think that was probably lost in that story. There's definitely learning in that process.”

Are there comparisons with how JLR reinvented the Land Rover Defender and upset the purists? “It's definitely a good parallel,” said Glover. “From the experiences in the reaction, and then parallels in what we're doing.

Glover: “The spirit of what we're doing is in keeping with our history”

GETTY IMAGES

“People ask me with Jaguar how you can completely break production, take a new concept, double the price point and increase the volume.

“We've already done it. We did exactly that with Defender. We took an icon that was cherished and we reimagined it. Most people would say it's an authentic Defender. It does what a Defender should do.

“It operates at a completely different price point and we've tripled the volume and doubled the price point. We're not looking to triple the Jaguar volume, but it's an indication that these things can be done.”

Much like the Defender reboot before it, the deep passion within Gaydon for its brands' storied cars will become even more evident closer to launch. When Jaguar starts talking beyond brand and design, said Glover, this “phase of the communication will help enormously” with those who are not convinced about what Jaguar is doing.

“There are clearly lots and lots of people out there that love Jaguars and heritage and history of the brand,” he said. “But the people here are exactly the same.

“Many people like that are in this organisation. You're in our head office today in Gaydon and there's about 20,000 people here. For many, the reason they're here is because their grandfather worked at Jaguar, their father worked here, and they have an affinity with it and they are deeply passionate about what we do. They care and they also really understand.

“I quite often get asked why I've cut the umbilical cord with Jaguar's history, to which my response is [I've done] quite the opposite.

“We've looked at our history and what we're going to be doing is not a literal interpretation. If you're looking for a literal interpretation, we'd have just gone and done an E-Type restomod and been rightly criticised.

“But if you look at Jaguar's history and look at those moments in its history when it was really successful and really relevant, culturally, socially, commercially, it's because

“I get asked why I’ve cut the umbilical cord with Jaguar’s history. I’ve done the opposite”

it was very, very clear about what it was about. There are some beautiful, iconic vehicles in our history and it’s understanding what was different about those.”

While there are nods to previous Jaguars in the design of the Type 00, Glover said “it’s not an E-Type and nor should it be” yet it does have “the essence of the brand” in it.

“The essence of the brand is that sense of having the strength of conviction of what we’re doing,” he said. “If everybody else is turning right, maybe we’re okay to turn left. When we’re questioned or challenged about our history, I’m at pains to point out that the spirit of what we’re doing is absolutely in keeping with our history.

“What we absolutely haven’t done is just ripped up the past and said we only look forward. It would be a big mistake. What’s happening in the market, with lots and lots of Chinese competitors, if we want to get into a ‘tech fest’ with those brands or a commodity pricing competition, that’s not a game we can win.

“But those brands don’t have 90 years of storied history. They don’t have Le Mans wins. They don’t have associations with some of the iconic people that we do. And why would you not want to lean into that from that sense?”

MARK TISSHAW

Type 00 forgoes a rear windscreen and so will the production GT

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

copy nothing

Jag’s rebrand last November sparked strong reactions

“I DON’T THINK you can plan to be the most talked-about brand on the planet…” says Jaguar boss Rawdon Glover, as he recalls those few days late last year after Jaguar’s rebranding, which must have left him reaching for his phone’s mute button.

Ultimately, “the strategy played out” because the rebranding was designed to increase interest in the concept car that was soon to be unveiled. “You do a tease phase to ultimately get more eyeballs on the real thing”, says Glover, and Jaguar certainly did that.

Yet he admits: “On a personal level, it took everybody a little bit by surprise in just how much commentary, how much debate, how much engagement there was on that.”

It was not all positive – quite the opposite – and there “was definitely a little bit of shock” in some of the responses. Glover’s analysis shows a clear dividing line between social media reaction and general media reaction. Guess which one was more constructive and nuanced.

Still, a goal of the rebranding was for Jaguar to be relevant. Glover says: “In the cultural Gulf Stream… when someone like Elon Musk is commenting on it, you think: ‘Oh, we’re in the conversation.’ In one respect, it’s job done. We’re getting visibility.

“That’s one of my reflections from it: that for years nobody was talking about Jaguar and then for a few days everybody was. Nobody had been talking about what Jaguar was doing prior to this, so if you gave me the option of being talked about or not talked about, it’s obvious what you’d take.”

The pile-on against the rebranding was “a bit frustrating” because two weeks later there would be a physical car to attach it to for the first time and all would become clear.

“We knew that when stories started to land on the concept, it would balance out the argument – and that’s pretty much what we saw,” says Glover.

Indeed, another reason the rebranding came before the car was because “everything we want to do at Jaguar is to be brand-led”.

Glover elaborates: “With the way EVs are moving and the homogeneity of EV products, if you are going to be an EV-only brand, your brand has really got to differentiate. So starting off just by talking about the brand and not leaping straight into a vehicle you can buy seemed like an entirely appropriate place to start.”

“The pile-on about the rebranding was ‘a bit frustrating’”

Glover says it “was interesting, really quite surprising” even, to see “the level of impatience” from some corners as to “how you could possibly talk about your brand for two weeks and not actually show us the car.

“I certainly didn’t lose any sleep over that.”

Our spy photographers have spotted a V8 CLE 63 testing at the Nürburgring

SPY SHOTS

MERCEDES-AMG REVERTS TO V8 ENGINE FOR NEW CLE 63

U-turn follows commercial failure of C63's four-cylinder PHEV system

Mercedes-AMG will return to V8 power, it has confirmed, with a fresh mild-hybrid engine set to make its debut in the new CLE 63 Coupé later this year.

The move marks a shift from the four-cylinder plug-in hybrid powertrain that AMG introduced in the C63 S E Performance saloon and estate. This failed to gain traction with customers, resulting in a significant drop in sales of one of the firm's best-sellers.

Sources in Germany have told Autocar that following the CLE 63, the V8 could be used in other AMG models, such as a revised C63 due in 2026.

In response, an AMG spokesperson denied this.

Full details of the new engine remain under wraps, but it is rumoured to lean heavily on AMG's existing 'M177' twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8 architecture.

While the V8's mooted return has been confirmed, it comes with a significant engineering change: AMG has abandoned the traditional cross-plane crankshaft in favour of a flat-plane design.

M177 will be used as the basis for AMG's new mild-hybrid V8

This promises to improve throttle response but will sacrifice the deep, burbling soundtrack traditionally associated with AMG V8s.

This layout – first adopted by AMG in 2021 for the 'M178' V8 in the GT Black Series – also enables a more compact crankcase design, allowing engineers to package the engine into models that weren't originally engineered for a V8, such as the fifth-generation C-Class.

It also provides scope for a higher redline and ignition cut-out.

To compensate for the higher-pitched, more aggressive sound of the flat-plane-crank V8, AMG plans to provide future models with an artificial sound generator to simulate the burbling soundtrack of its most celebrated models.

In its ultimate form, the new V8 is expected to receive a mild-hybrid system with an integrated starter-motor within the automatic gearbox for both additional power and greater fuel efficiency.

The current C63's combination of an electronically turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine and a permanent magnet synchronous motor produces 671bhp and 752lb ft of torque.

Despite those impressive figures, the shift from a traditional V8 to an electrified four-cylinder drivetrain was widely criticised, particularly for a lack of acoustic character.

By comparison, the previous-generation C63 S, equipped with the 'M177' cross-plane twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8, delivered 503bhp and 516lb ft but a far more engaging experience.

Beyond the new V8, AMG is set to introduce greater design differentiation between its lower-end and top-of-the-line models within each market segment.

AMG chairman Michael Schiebe has laid out aggressive growth targets for the brand, including an increase in annual sales from 140,000 to 200,000.

GREG KABLE

'FASCINATING PHEV – THAT FALLS FLAT'

Did half the cylinders mean half the fun? Yes, according to our testers, who found the C63 S E Performance "ultimately disappoints as a driver's car". While AMG had pulled off a "fascinating engineering feat" in swapping a V8 for a four-cylinder PHEV system, they said, this C63 "falls flat as an exciting super-estate".

Scan this QR code to read the full test for free*.

- **Turn to p43 to read why deputy road test editor Richard Lane thinks this is "a victory for the enthusiast".**

*For three weeks from publication date

SPECIAL EDITIONS MARK END OF ICE A110 PRODUCTION

THE ALPINE A110 will gain two new performance-honed special editions, the GTS and R 70, to mark its final year in production before the Renault Group's performance division goes all-electric.

The popular two-seater arrived in 2017 to herald the revival of Alpine after a 22-year hiatus and has spawned a range of special editions since.

With the recently launched A290 hot hatch signalling Alpine's impending EV transformation, the French brand has confirmed that the petrol-engined A110 will go out of production in 12 months' time.

Its Dieppe factory will then undergo an extensive transformation so that it can produce future EVs, such as the A390 crossover and next-generation A110.

Until then and alongside these new models, the entry-level A110 will remain on sale priced from £55,160.

GTS

The new A110 GTS will replace the GT and S versions, with the aim of combining the everyday comfort of the former and the "exhilarating driving experience" of the latter. It will be priced from £67,311.

The GTS has a chassis based on that of the S, the same 300bhp engine as the R 70 and a new aero kit derived from the hardcore R, featuring a front splitter, side skirts, a rear spoiler and a rear wing.

Buyers can select optional 18in GT race wheels fitted with Michelin Cup 2 tyres, plus there's a range of new bespoke colours and a grey leather interior featuring carbonfibre elements.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

ALPINE
A110 R 70

R 70

The new A110 R70 is named in recognition of Alpine's 70th anniversary and is effectively a special edition of the hardcore R variant that was launched in 2022.

It retains a 300bhp tune of the turbocharged 1.8-litre four-cylinder engine, with extensive use of carbonfibre bodywork to further reduce weight.

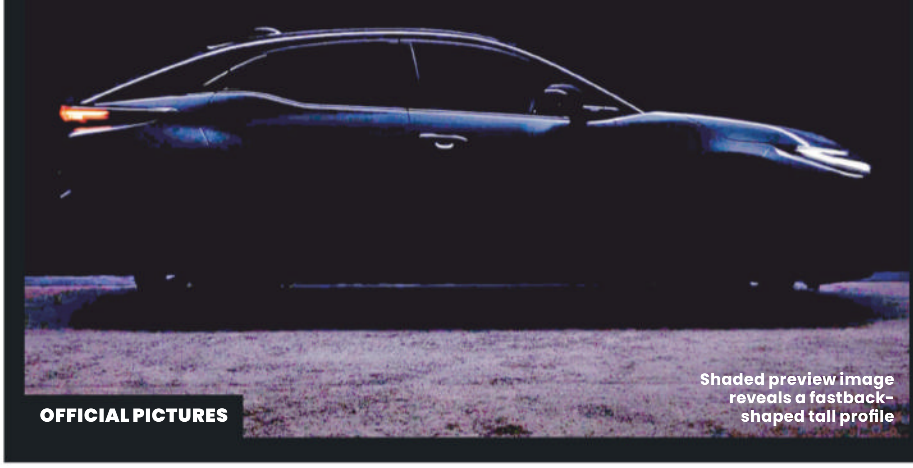
The R 70 will be offered with four customised interiors from Alpine's Atelier range, Michelin Cup 2 tyres and an Akrapovic exhaust, plus 70th-anniversary logos on both exterior and interior elements.

There will also be an even more limited R 70 Tricolour run of 70 blue, 70 white and 70 red cars – a nod to both the French flag and the three A106s in a promotional photo staged by Jean Rédélé when he launched the Alpine brand in 1955.

Tricolour cars also gain new Sabelt upholstery and body-coloured wheel rims.

Pricing for the R 70 will start at £103,345.

TOYOTA TO UNVEIL THIRD ELECTRIC CROSSOVER



Shaded preview image reveals a fastback-shaped tall profile

OFFICIAL PICTURES

TOYOTA WILL REVEAL a new EV on 11 March, expected to be the production version of 2022's bZ Compact Crossover concept.

It will be Toyota's third EV, joining the bZ4X and Urban Cruiser crossovers.

A single image and a preview video have been released, revealing that many elements from the concept have been retained, such as the rakish roofline, rear light bar, 'hammerhead' front end and extended bonnet.

There are similarities with the Chinese-market bZ3C fastback, fuelling suggestions that it could be a European variant of that FAW Toyota-built car.

Like the Urban Cruiser, the new EV is expected to be sold with a range of battery sizes and motor set-ups. The video shows an AWD-badged version.

What the car will be called remains a mystery, because Toyota has moved away from its 'Beyond Zero' naming strategy in favour of reusing names from its past, as it did with the Urban Cruiser.

The new EV will sit between the £31k C-HR and £43k bZ4X in Toyota's line-up, so expect it to start from around £38k.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

KIA PREVIEWS £25K, LONG-RANGE RENAULT 5 FIGHTER

New EV2, due in 2026, is announced with an eye-catching concept

The EV2 will arrive next year as one of Kia's smallest and most affordable electric cars yet.

Previewed by the new EV2 concept, the small crossover will be priced from around £25,000 and positioned as a rival to the Renault 5, Renault 4 and MG 4 EV from 2026.

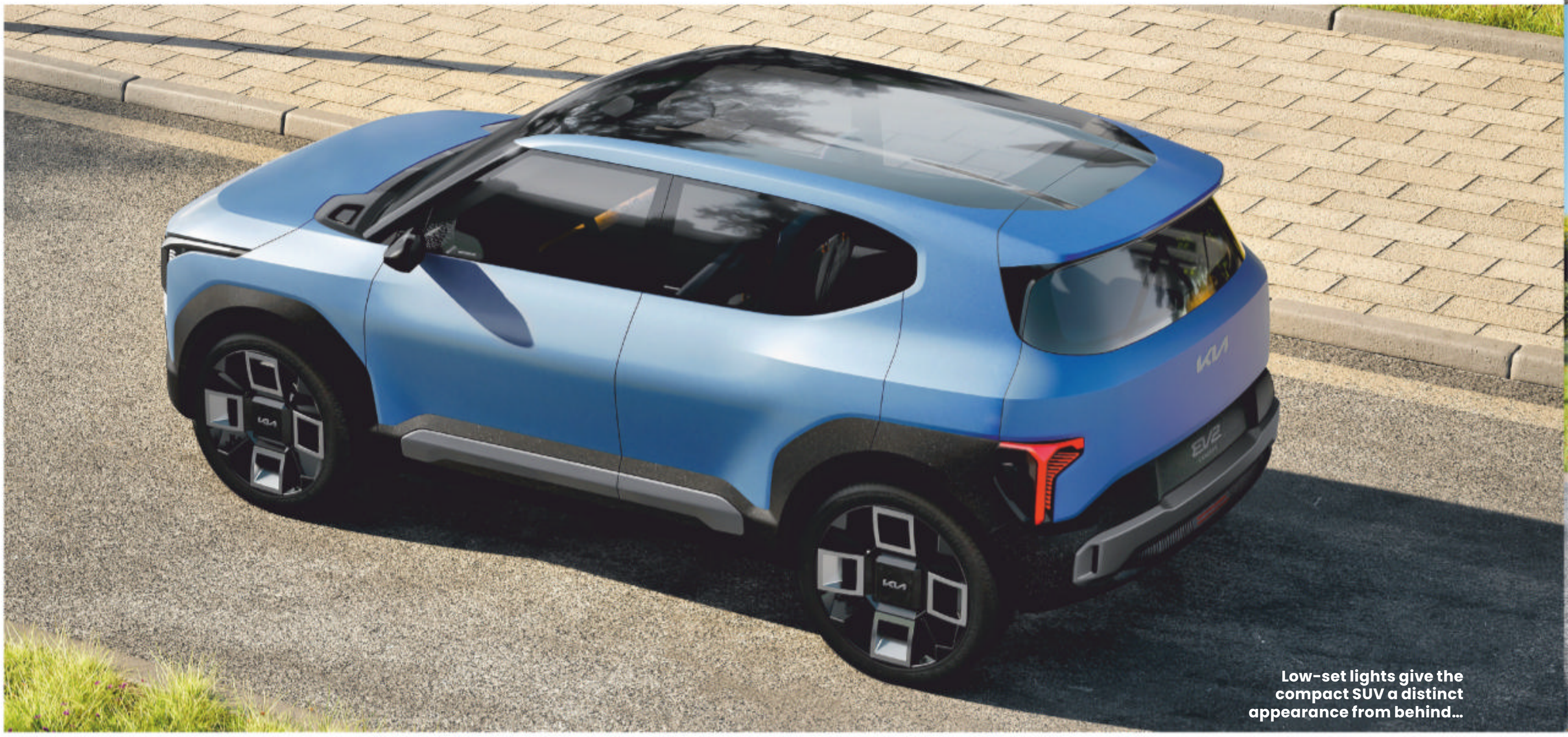
The production EV2 is expected to utilise the entry-level version of the Hyundai Motor Group's E-GMP platform, which also underpins Kia's larger EV3 and EV4 (see below).

While technical details remain under wraps, the EV2 will offer a similar assortment of powertrains as its siblings, which both pair a 201bhp motor with a choice of 58.3kWh or 81.4kWh battery packs.

The former gives the EV3 a range of 270 miles, the latter an impressive 375 miles.

It's possible, however, that the EV2 will be restricted to the smaller battery due to packaging and its focus as the entry-level small model in Kia's EV range.

Regardless, this would still put the EV2 ahead of its rivals: the Renault 4, for example, manages 250 miles from a 52kWh pack.



Low-set lights give the compact SUV a distinct appearance from behind...

HATCH AND SALOON GIVE NEW EV4 BROAD APPEAL

THE NEW KIA EV4 will attempt to dethrone the Tesla Model 3 when it arrives later this year, priced from £31,000.

The first images of the production car reveal that little has changed from the EV4 concept shown in 2023.

The EV4 will offer both hatchback and saloon bodies, the former roughly the size of the Hyundai Kona Electric, the latter's stretched rump making it longer than the Model 3.

It will be sold primarily in hatchback form in Europe, where it will be a natural rival to the Citroën ë-C4 and Volkswagen ID 3.

Both versions will have a single front-mounted motor producing 201bhp and a 0-62mph sprint time in the mid-7sec range.

All Kia EVs are destined to receive hot versions, so a dual-motor, four-wheel-drive EV4 GT with power and pace to match the MG 4 XPower is expected further down the line.

The entry-level EV4 gets a 58.3kWh battery pack that yields a range of 267 miles in the saloon and 255 miles in the less aerodynamic hatchback.

In Long Range form with an 81.4kWh battery, the saloon gets 391 miles and the hatchback 367 miles.

Inside, the EV4 has the same 30in dash screen as the EV3 but now including entertainment apps such as Netflix and YouTube.

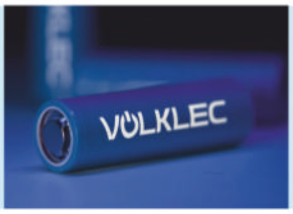
All-new EV4 will get nearly 400 miles in its longest-range form

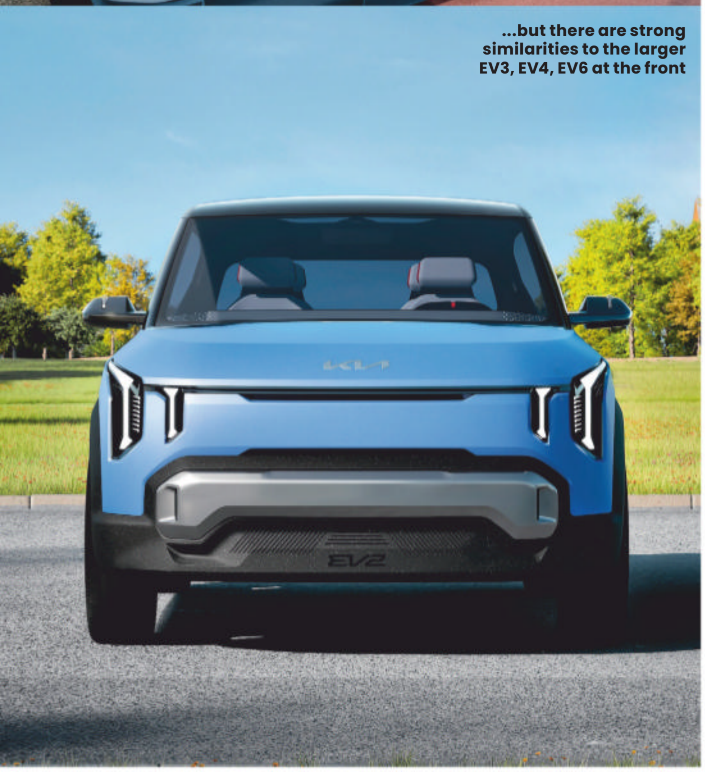
ASTON AXES UK WORKERS

Aston Martin is cutting 170 jobs, all but 20 of them UK-based – 5% of its workforce. This will save it about £25m a year. The firm recorded a pre-tax loss of £289m in 2024 as its debt swelled to more than £1 billion.

COVENTRY BATTERY BOOST

Start-up Volklec will start making battery cells in Coventry this year. It has licensed two lithium ion designs from China's Far East Battery. Annual capacity will initially be 0.1GWh before a 1GWh line is added.





...but there are strong similarities to the larger EV3, EV4, EV6 at the front

Aesthetically, the EV2 represents the next step in Kia's 'Opposites United' design philosophy.

The most obvious developments are its smooth exterior surfaces and front lighting treatment, with an extra set of claw-like running lights mounted inboard of those that bracket the faces of the EV2's bigger siblings.

At the rear end, the lights are mounted especially low and have a more rounded design than we are used to.

Inside, it gets the same combined instrument and infotainment display as the EV3, spanning roughly half the width of the dashboard.

Many of the EV2 show car's other features – flip-up front seat bases, removable speakers and digital message boards on the side windows, for instance – are set to remain conceptual, however.

The arrival of the EV2 will mark the completion of the next phase in the firm's electrification plan: it has turned its attention away from premium models aimed at early adopters (the EV6 and EV9) to launch an assault on what Kia president Ho Sung Song called the "early majority".

"From our expanded mass EV line-up, we're not just providing [mobility], we're infusing electrification into customers' daily lives, making EVs more accessible for early majority customers who are ready to embrace the future," he said.

CHARLIE MARTIN

KIA EXPLORES PICANTO-LIKE BABY EV

Kia "definitely needs" an entry-level electric model to broaden the appeal of its EV range and is "internally studying" the prospect, president Ho Sung Song has revealed.

Song said that the prospective 'EV1' could take the form of a city car that sits below the EV2, a more affordable version of an existing model or something else entirely.

He hinted that it could start at a price of around €25k (£21k), referring to the fact there will be a difference of around €5000 between the incoming EV2 (€30k) and existing EV3 (€35k).

He said: "If we want to move to the late majority customer target group, definitely we need a lower size of model, or a lower-priced model, and we're internally studying what our entry EV model will be apart from our EV2.

"Maybe next EV Day [in 2026] we will show you what we're planning."

The unveiling of an 'EV1' concept then would put the production car on track to arrive in 2027 – a year after the new Renault Twingo and around the same time as the Volkswagen ID 1 and Dacia Spring successor.

It would initially coexist with the ICE Picanto, which Kia UK recently committed to selling "for as long as we are allowed to".

Song eyes 'lower-priced model'

AUTOCAR IMAGE

Kia is looking at ways to create a small 'EV1' it could sell for £21k

WATCH OUT, FORD: HERE COMES A KIA VAN

The new PV5 electric van is cheaper than the diesel Ford Transit Custom, at £25,000 (excluding VAT).

The first in Kia's line of Platform Beyond Vehicles (PBV) EVs, it will be followed in 2027 by a larger PV7 van and a passenger-carrying PV5 at about £45k.

Based on a development of the 400V E-GMP platform used by the Kia EV4, the PV5 van is fitted with a 161bhp front-mounted motor and offers a choice of three battery packs: 43.3kWh, 51.5kWh and 71.2kWh. Range tops out at 249 miles.

PV5 brings sci-fi design to function-over-form van market

STELLANTIS PROFITS CRASH

Stellantis's profits fell by 70% to £4.5bn in 2024, due to falling sales, particularly in North America (-25%). Chairman John Elkann said it was "a year of stark contrasts" with "results falling short of our potential".

UK-MADE MINI EVs DELAYED

Electric Mini production at Oxford has been delayed indefinitely. BMW blamed "multiple uncertainties facing the industry". It has spent over £600m upgrading its UK sites for the 2026 transfer of EVs from China.

NEW BMW EV TECH TO GIVE 'QUANTUM LEAP FORWARD'

Incoming Gen6 platform will transform all future BMW, Mini and Rolls EVs

BMW will enter its next, Neue Klasse generation with an all-new EV platform that is claimed to drastically cut the cost of production while increasing efficiency and available range.

Labelled 'Gen6', the platform, including batteries and electric motors, will be used first by the next BMW iX3, which was previewed by the Vision Neue Klasse SUV concept and will be unveiled in September.

The 800V platform is claimed by BMW to be a "quantum leap forward" in terms of technology compared with today's offerings.

"Neue Klasse is not just a new car: it is a new technology," said BMW Group purchasing and supply board member Joachim Post.

The scalable platform will eventually be used by all BMW, Mini and Rolls-Royce EVs. Here's a preview of the tech.

WILL RIMELL

BATTERY PACKS

The breakthrough architecture is centred on a new nickel-manganese-cobalt battery that uses cylindrical cells. BMW claims these are 20% denser and easier to package than modules (made up of square cells) found in today's 'Gen5' lithium ion packs.

The headline figures are that these new batteries increase range by 30%, efficiency by 20% and charging speeds by 30% (186 miles in 10 minutes) and they reduce production costs by up to 50% compared with today's packs. BMW has yet to disclose any capacity information.

The reduced cost - achieved by moving most of the development and assembly in-house – will be passed onto buyers, said BMW's Joachim Post. "It is important to be competitive in the market," he said, adding that this helps in the push to achieve ICE-EV price parity.

To give an idea of the technology's advancement, if you applied that range boost to the recently refreshed BMW iX – which in xDrive60 form offers the most miles per charge in the brand's stable – it would increase maximum range by 129 miles to 555 miles.

New packs can cut production costs by 50%

Key to the tech gains are the new cylindrical cells. Built in-house, they can be attached directly to the pack in a process called cell-to-pack. This not only saves money because fewer parts are used (such as modules) but it also reduces the weight and size of the batteries, enabling the use of slimmer packs.

As part of a "clean-sheet way of thinking", these packs are then bolted directly to the bottom of the chassis. By comparison, today's packs are fitted under the floor of the car, rather than forming the floor. BMW claims that this new technique increases structural integrity, optimises car integration, saves money on parts, reduces weight and maximises interior space.

What's more, the new pack allows for sleeker, flatter and more aerodynamic car designs, potentially eliminating one of the major design hallmarks of today's high-sided EVs.

To maximise interior space within this set-up and keep the height of the car as low as possible, BMW will unusually bolt the front seats directly to the pack, with the battery's Energy Master (which manages energy output and thermal levels) positioned below the rear seats.

BMW DOESN'T NEED SOLID-STATE BATTERIES – YET

BMW won't need a solid-state battery for another eight years, it claims, with bosses insisting there is "a long way to go" with today's lithium ion batteries.

Solid-state batteries are widely regarded as crucial to EV longevity, because they offer greater capacity, enable longer ranges and are more robust than today's packs.

But while rivals such as Mercedes-Benz claim they are close to putting the technology into production, BMW doesn't need it yet, according to head of next-generation battery tech Martin Schuster. "The most important thing is the lithium ion battery: it's not finished," he said. "You [still] see improvements. There is no one and only battery. It will not come."

He also told Autocar: "We can do [solid-state] now, but the cost in the packaging makes no sense to do. There is still a long way to go with lithium ion."

Purchasing and supply boss Joachim Post added that the BMW Group's new Gen6 batteries – which can take on 186 miles' worth of energy in as little as 10 minutes – offer more than enough for what the market currently wants.

"Would a customer be willing to pay a much higher price for solid-state for maybe a little bit faster charging?" he asked. "Cost is one of the most important points [for EV buyers]."

Gen6 batteries charge fast enough, says BMW

ELECTRIC MOTORS

New and updated motors are also important to the Gen6's advancements. The core powerplant is the electrically excited synchronous motor (EESM), which can be traced back to the first-generation iX3 in 2018, although it has been developed extensively since then and is offered in multiple power outputs.

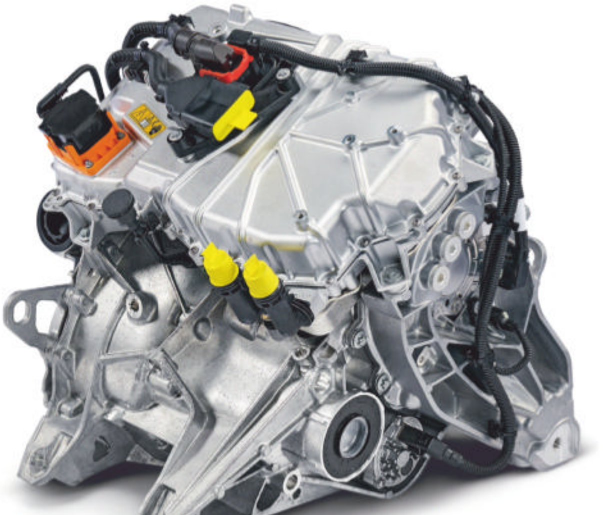
Now heavily enhanced, it is available in four variants that range from 270bhp to 400bhp and is exclusively attached to the rear axle, where up to two units can be fitted. A single-speed gearbox is integrated into its casing.

New with the Gen6 platform is a small asynchronous motor. Weighing just 70kg, it is offered with 161bhp or 241bhp. No gearbox is attached to it.

As seen with the BMW Vision Driving Experience (Autocar, 19 February), it is fitted exclusively to the front axle, where – as with the EESM – two can be used. This means BMW can now offer tri- and quad-motor configurations alongside the single- and dual-motor set-ups of today.

The motors have been configured for use in all models from entry-level cars to top-rung M cars. BMW's M performance division has been involved in the motor development process to enable this.

A key objective for the new motors was efficiency. When they are combined in a dual-motor set-up, the number of miles that are lost through inefficiency is said to be reduced by 40% compared with two last-generation EESMs. What's more, they are 20% cheaper to produce and they weigh 10% less.



New asynchronous motor is front-mounted

STAGE IS NOW SET FOR REAR-DRIVE MINI EVs

Next-generation electric Minis will switch from the firm's customary front-wheel-drive set-up to rear-drive due to the adoption of the new BMW Group Gen6 platform.

The 800V architecture, which will eventually be used by all cars in the group's stable, can only support the EESM motor (the only BMW Group motor to house a gearbox) on the rear axle.

BMW Group engineers told Autocar at the launch of the platform that there are currently no plans to change this.

When asked if this meant the end of front-wheel-drive electric Minis in the future, purchasing and supply board member Joachim Post would not directly confirm it. Instead, he said: "We will see what the future is."

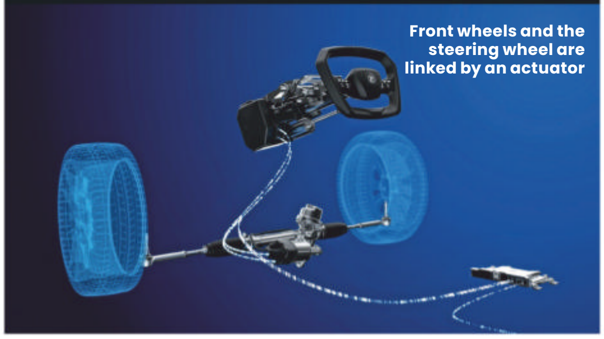
Post added that the brand's future models will "always have Mininess". He questioned "what is the best, the optimum for the package?" and added: "We want to make one thing feasible: sheer driving pleasure."

Any such changes will still be a long way off, given that Mini's entire line-up – which includes the new Cooper, Aceman and Countryman – has been completely refreshed during the past 18 months.

Mini EVs, like the petrol cars, are currently front-drive. That could change

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



Front wheels and the steering wheel are linked by an actuator

WHY THE CAR INDUSTRY IS TURNING TO STEER-BY-WIRE

THE NIO ET9 now comes with a ZF full steer-by-wire system that has no mechanical connection between the road wheels and the steering wheel.

It's among the first production cars to be fitted with steer-by-wire, but not *the* first. Infiniti tried it with the Q50 as far back as 2013. The Toyota bZ4X is also due to get it at some stage in the future. But the writing has been on the wall about steer-by-wire technology for quite a few years and its mainstream inception has crept even closer with the wide-scale adoption of electric power steering.

The ZF system is based on its Cubix software suite, developed specifically for by-wire steering, braking and damping systems. Some electromechanical rear-axle steering systems are already by-wire activated and ZF's own Active Kinematics Control comes in two versions: one with a single actuator controlling both rear wheels and another with individual actuators, one for each rear wheel.

With steer-by-wire, the only link between the steering wheel and the front wheels is an electromechanical actuator, which senses the steering wheel rotation, converts it to an electrical signal and passes it to a controller that in turn actuates the steering. More than that, the actuator can generate torque as well and this enables it to deliver what ZF claims is the natural steering feedback from the road that you might get with a mechanical system.

Experienced test engineers can calibrate the system to provide different ratios of steering on the fly, depending on the driving situation. For instance, if the driver selects Sport mode, the steering could become sharper in its response, with fewer turns lock to lock. It could do the opposite at higher speeds, emulating more turns lock to lock to give greater straight-line stability.

These features exist in more conventional power steering systems already, but mechanically. Honda's Variable Gear Steering, launched on the S2000 back in 2000, is an early example. But with steer-by-wire, such features become simpler to realise because the characteristics are set in software.

In theory, that should make it easier for engineers to tune the systems during development because of the almost infinite number of changes that could be made to get the steering feel and response just right. It also means that engineers at individual car manufacturers can easily be involved in the tuning process to create steering attributes that best represent a particular brand.

Realistically, attributes could be varied across a model range (say, from a base version to a GTI) through software changes but without the need for additional hardware.

Unsurprisingly, ZF sees a major opportunity with steer-by-wire if and when fully automated cars become a reality. In such a case, systems could also include steering wheels that retract into the dash when the car takes over complete control, freeing up more space for the driver.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

NEW AUDI A6 AVANT KEEPS THE DIESEL FLAME BURNING

Sporty-looking next-gen estate arrives in diesel-hybrid and petrol guise

The new A6 Avant has been unveiled as one of the final diesel cars Audi will launch and one of only a few diesel estates left on the market.

The executive wagon was due to take the A7 moniker under Audi's recently axed naming strategy, where EVs were even-numbered and ICE cars odd-numbered.

Instead, it is called the A6 Avant and sits beside the technically unrelated A6 Avant E-tron EV, with both spearheading Audi's estate range. The combustion car arrives with turbo petrol and turbo diesel-hybrid power and will be badged TFSI (for petrol) or TDI (diesel) to differentiate it from the EV.

Both ICE engines are 2.0-litre four-pot units that put out 201bhp, with the petrol offering 251lb ft and the diesel 295lb ft. Each is paired exclusively to an automatic gearbox and the diesel can be had with Quattro all-wheel drive. The 48V diesel powertrain also offers limited electric-only driving from step-off or at a cruise.

A 362bhp 3.0-litre turbo V6 petrol hybrid can also be had in certain markets but not the UK. It is expected to be offered at a later date in the upcoming S6 Avant.

Likewise, some optional tech features such as rear-wheel steering will not be available in the UK. However, air suspension, previously not offered here on the A6, is now available (at an expected cost of around £1700).

The new A6 Avant is a big departure aesthetically from the car it replaces. It has been bulked up visually to create a sportier look that is closer to the previous S6 Avant than the A6, Audi designers told Autocar.

The front end gets an extensive refresh, with the Audi rings straddling a new-look grille and bonnet lip, in a similar way to the E-tron GT. For the A6, this is the first time the rings have not been positioned solely on the grille itself.

At 4990mm, the estate is 60mm longer than the car it replaces. Its roofline rakes back to a sculpted rear end that is dominated by a striking new light bar, slightly similar to the new A5's. The indicators are incorporated within this unit and, as with the A5, the rear lights can be personalised.

Designers have given the car a unique set of rear brake lights that "stand the car out as an A6 on the road", they told Autocar. The boot offers 503 litres of storage, rising to 1534 litres with the rear seats down.

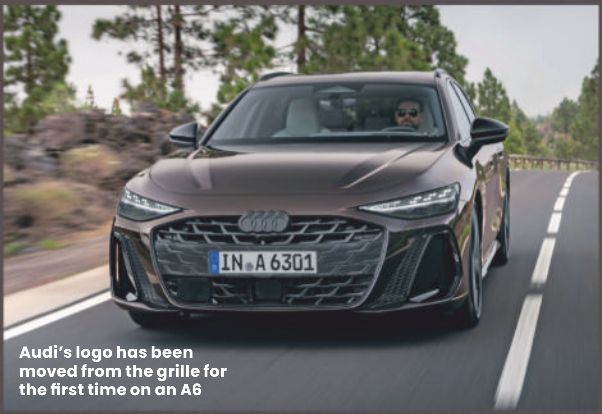
The interior mirrors much of Audi's range, such as the new Q5. Three screens feature: a 11.0in driver's display, a 14.5in infotainment touchscreen and an optional 10.9in passenger screen. As on the A6 E-tron, a 'dynamic' sunroof can be fitted. This can be switched between translucent and clear via a button press. It also has a slatted pergola mode.

The new A6 Avant is claimed to be better to drive than its predecessor. This is due to a stiffened torsion bar and control arm bushings, a more rigid steering rack and increased front camber. Audi says all of this heightens road feedback and steering response.

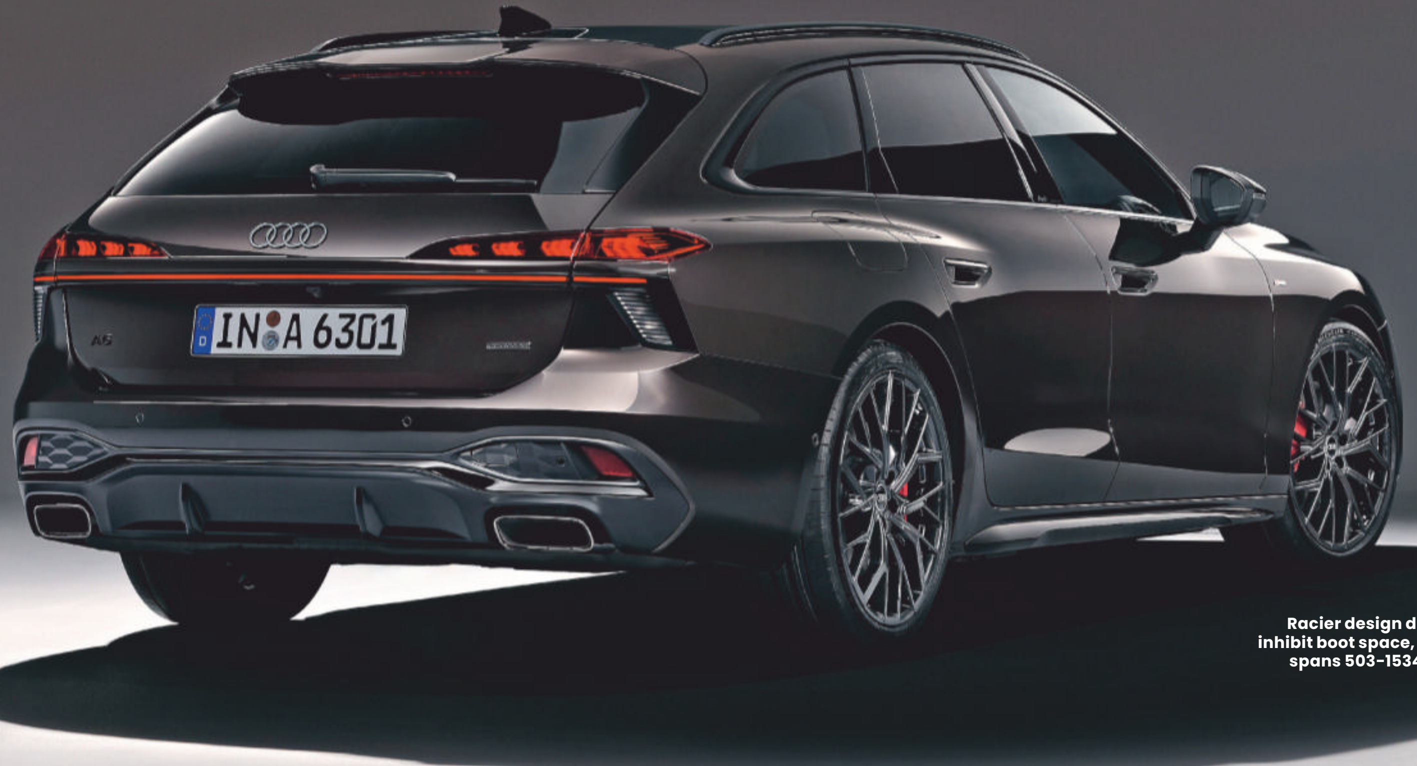
Stopping power has also been overhauled in the A6 Avant in diesel-hybrid form. Using brake-by-wire tech – a non-mechanical braking system that decouples the brake pedal and brake hydraulics – computers calculate regenerative braking levels and whether the discs are required.

The new A6 Avant starts from £52,510, rising to £64,480 in TDI Quattro guise with Edition One trim, which adds 20in alloys, red brake calipers, black decals and more.

Like previous generations - and mirroring the A6 E-tron – the Avant is expected to be joined by a near-identical A6 saloon soon.
WILL RIMELL


Audi's logo has been moved from the grille for the first time on an A6

"The new Audi A6 Avant starts from £52,510 and rises to £64,480"


Racier design doesn't inhibit boot space, which spans 503-1534 litres

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

There was an abundance of supreme metal at Retro Rides to browse and buy…
65
BARDAHL
ICONIC

SATURDAY, SUNDAY

What a week! It began with a lingering visit to one of the few motor shows I'd never attended: Race Retro in the old Royal Showground at Stoneleigh Park, south of Coventry. You can feast your eyes on all kinds of racing cars from newish to very old and watch some healthy ones (rally cars) being driven in anger on tracks just outside the main pavilions.

It's a friendly, slightly homespun event, busy but not rammed, where you can feel everyone's anticipation for the impending race season.

It's amazing what's offered: even if you're no use with a spanner (like me), you can still admire the beautifully engineered hot bits offered everywhere.

I went with one of my sons, whose current fixation is the 'dog-bone' Ford Escort Mk1. We must have looked at half a dozen prime RS1600s, RS2000s and Mexicos, many for sale, but managed to restrict ourselves to a prime-looking 1:43-scale Twin Cam. Also prominent was a stately 07-plate Bentley Arnage that eventually sold for £23,000 to someone who, as well as loving luxury, is probably a bit of a gambler.

MONDAY

I took my new, red Jeep Wrangler Sahara (first report coming soon) on its first decent trip – to Crewe from London in the rain – and was surprised by its ability to roll pleasantly along in its ultra-tall seventh gear, delivering almost 30mpg. I had imagined motorways might be a bit of a trial, but the Sahara is much more house-trained than the Rubicons I've known. I found myself thinking this could be a decent daily driver, but we will see.

TUESDAY

A delightful day in the bosom of Bentley, attending one of those driving/talking days they do better than anyone else in the world.

I grabbed a fascinating half hour with CEO Frank-Steffen Walliser (expect a podcast) but otherwise devoted myself to driving the new V8-hybrid Flying Spur limo. Last year I spent several months in the V6 Spur, which was so excellent that I didn't entirely trust myself to perceive the improvements brought to this latest version by more V8 poke, even more versatile air suspension and a rear-steer system. But the benefits were soon obvious: the new Spur is flatter and quieter, is more discreetly powerful and, although it's 5.3 metres long, manoeuvres like a Volkswagen Passat. It might now be the best Bentley of all.

Driving the Wrangler back home after being so thoroughly steeped in non-Jeep luxury was still pleasant – a decent test of its all-round enjoyability, I reckon.

Jackson led Peugeot and Citroën in a stellar 48-year automotive career

> **"I'm extra lucky: our Alpine A110 needs an MOT today"**

WEDNESDAY

Lots of 'new opportunity' stuff in the press from new Peugeot boss Alain Favey reminds me to record my great admiration for his remarkable predecessor, Linda Jackson, now retired, who brought much good change to the famous French company, and to Citroën before that.

Jackson has surely set an all-time record by being the only British woman ever to run two French car companies. More to the point, she did both jobs brilliantly, with a unique mix of style and quiet authority. Citroën's return to delivering automotive comfort, one of its greatest traditions, happened on her watch, and it continues to make double-chevron cars special.

THURSDAY

As I write, I think we're experiencing That Day. It's the one that comes towards the end of every winter, when the days have lengthened a bit, there's sun on your back when you walk outside and the keys to the garage doors seem shinier than usual. The roads are dry, and I'm extra lucky: our Alpine A110 needs an MOT today and our local tester is 10 enjoyable miles away. What's more, snow isn't forecast tomorrow…

…including this '60s stunner, Cropley's latest set of wheels
MINICHAMPS
Ford Escort TC
MINICHAMPS

AND ANOTHER THING

I've been devouring Motorsport UK's latest StreetCar newsletter (all about low-end car competition), because it has a story by John Chambers, a bloke I've actually raced, about running a Tesla Model 3 Performance in hillclimbs and sprints. Well schooled in other disciplines, John's awesome in EVs, and the fact that he now likes them best answers pertinent questions about whether they're the right mix of challenge and fun.

GET IN TOUCH
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

I've bought an Audi A2. It's a 2003 74bhp 1.4-litre diesel and, because it didn't have an MOT, it cost me £500.

So far, I've fitted a new rear wheel bearing (£30), cleaned some mould from its crannies and sent it to be MOT tested. It failed only on headlight alignment and parking brake effectiveness, the latter perhaps because it has recently spent time sitting.

By the time you read this, I hope to have sorted both, plus the sole advisory note about headlight cloudiness, meaning I will have a fully roadworthy, clean-MOTed A2 that the tester called "really tidy" for less than £550.

You will hear more about it, of course, in columns and the Our Cars sections of this mag in future, and no doubt I will bang on about it at length on the podcast (get it every Wednesday from etc and so on).

But it's a photo from the previous owner, showing a return of 75mpg, that has got me thinking about just how efficient the A2 is – and could be.

It's aluminium-structured and compact so has a kerb weight of only 960kg in this form. But while running a sponge over it, I reminded myself how the field of aerodynamics has moved on in the past quarter century. The A2 TDI had a drag coefficient of 0.28, which a special low-drag, big-economy edition managed to improve to 0.25. It took things like 145-profile tyres and an underbody redesign to do that. Yet today, in cars that somehow don't look anything like so slippery, figures in the low 0.20s are increasingly common.

On the face of it, the A2 looks a pretty efficient shape. The front is well rounded and the roof arches in a teardrop profile, which is the most aerodynamic shape there is. Cars could all be incredibly efficient if they were 12 metres long and tapered for a teardrop profile that would retain laminar air flow right along the body.

A2 was renowned for its low drag, but Taycan and other EVs have moved the game on

But they're not, so air has to break clear of the body somehow, and to cleave it off quickly is better than prolonging its departure, which is why so many modern cars have boot-lip or rooftop spoilers.

A rounded rear end promotes air swirling and creating little eddies, almost clinging to the body and adding drag. That car designers go to the trouble of aerodynamically sculpting rear light clusters shows how it's worth making even small improvements here. Especially with EVs, in which aerodynamics play a bigger part in the overall efficiency than in ICE cars, and because more drag doesn't just add fuel cost but charging time too.

> **"Cars could all be incredibly efficient if they were 12m long"**

It's such little details that the old A2 doesn't have. Its door handles stick out, its windscreen wiper sits above the windscreen edge and there's (very subtle) body cladding.

Practicality and regulations played their part too. The A2 has a little lip spoiler on its hatch, which could be more efficient if it were bigger, and could extend vertically down the sides of the car too, like the ones they put on the back of lorries. But that would make rear visibility even worse than it is and could have spoilt the lines of what I think is a very pretty little car. Ditto if the rear lights had been sculpted, rather than shaped to match the body: more efficient, less attractive.

There are things Audi didn't do at the time, then, that it would feel almost compelled to do today, especially on a car marketed, as the A2 was, as technically clever and uber-efficient.

Still, for a late-1990s design, it's hardly shabby. I haven't done the calculations, but there are estimates that it would take only 10bhp, plus or minus (probably plus) a couple, to propel an A2 on the flat at 60mph. Which sounds like not a lot until you remember that a hire go-kart, much lighter and smaller but much less slippery, will do about the same with similar power.

I think making an A2 as slippery as possible would be a fun project: reshaping its spoilers, fairing-in its rear wheels, extending its bonnet and so on.

Yes, I know that none of those things would make it as efficient as an EV. And save for fitting skinnier tyres, I'm not going to do any of them anyway. I'm just going to enjoy this little marvel for what it is.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

One of Prior's cars is far more slippery than the other. No prizes for guessing which

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Modern F1 cars draw in younger fans – but are too complex for continued racing

The most tiresome catchphrase in motorsport? 'It's not as good as it used to be.' Inevitably true in some respects, it's also false in at least as many and always utterly pointless to dwell on. The world keeps spinning, and while it's both enjoyable and important to reflect on and indulge in the past (I admit that I'm as guilty as anyone), it's also vital to live for today and squeeze every drop from the here and now.

Car shows used to be bigger, better and unmissable, and the same is true of their motorsport equivalents. But so what? They still matter and still bring us together. In January, I heard plenty lament how small Autosport International at Birmingham's NEC was compared with how it used to be. Wasted oxygen. Post-Covid, the show is undergoing a process of rejuvenation, like most things. It isn't easy and will take time. But under new management, it has survived against the odds and will only improve if those within the sport get behind it. No longer relevant? Well, let's make it so.

Race Retro's business is precisely to trade on the past (the clue is in the name) while existing as a historic race and rally fair to keep the flame burning in a stark and difficult present. Which is why it was heart-warming to find the show, held just south of Coventry, back in rude health last month, especially after floods forced a late and devastating cancellation last year. Many of us feared for its future, but bustling halls packed with great cars and a pleasing air of positivity among exhibitors fired our carburettors back into life as we look ahead to another great season in the old-car world.

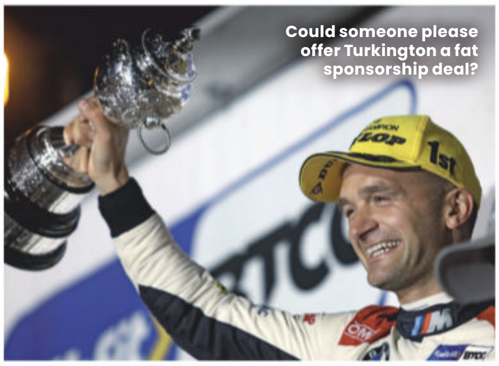
The contradiction of celebrating times when it was all supposedly better, among promoters, car owners and drivers who recognise how crucial it is to embrace the present and the future, has never been more apt.

> **"Shows used to be bigger and better. But so what?"**

MODERNITY AMONG THE RETRO

While racing's greatest hits remain vital and obviously popular, show organisers will have noted how recent history tends to draw a crowd. Among the Formula 1 collection at Race Retro, celebrating the 75th anniversary of the drivers' world championship, was a Racing Point RP19 that Sergio Pérez campaigned in 12 grands prix during 2019. It looked massive and ungainly, even compared with its 2010 Force India VJM03 sibling beside it. Yet as one of the newest F1 cars to have found its way into private ownership, its sculpted intricacy couldn't help but draw eyeballs. Those in the nostalgia biz are already fully plugged into the power of recent history to pull in fresh generations turned on by modern F1.

The conundrum is that such cars can't be the future of historic racing. TDF, the specialist that looks after the RP19, must strip out its complex hybrid powertrain and source a relatively simple and suitable engine to let it live again for demos and parades. Cars from the digital age are just too complicated and expensive to be revived for competition, at least in period spec – so it's just as well that old favourites from the 1960s, '70s and '80s remain in circulation to keep the past alive.



Could someone please offer Turkington a fat sponsorship deal?

With that in mind, key UK promoters Equipe Classic Racing and the Historic Sports Car Club both had a big presence at Race Retro to entice entrants old and new to staple classes and a few that are being refreshed – and reported just how useful the show is for kick-starting conversations.

Likewise, France's V de V Sports organisation, which runs a pair of six-hour races and a full 24 Hours at Paul Ricard, made the trip to talk more Brits into crossing the Channel. Carnet documents don't help the cause (cheers, Brexit), but racers are optimists and adventurers by nature and tend to find a way forward.

So it is with the weight of the past. We love looking back, but what comes next matters most.

TURKINGTON OUT OF BTCC

On that point, I was so sad to hear that Colin Turkington's time in the British Touring Car Championship appears to be over. "Commercial realities" have forced the Northern Irishman to step down from BMW's WSR team – so financial constraint has robbed us of a chance to see if a touring car great can beat fellow four-time champion Ash Sutton to become the first to achieve five titles. How frustrating.

Turkington has been a headline (and class) act in the BTCC since 2002 and at 42 remains a topline force. That much was clear from his 'kingmaker' role in the Brands Hatch finale last season, when he moved over twice (with gritted teeth, no doubt) to allow team-mate Jake Hill to score what he needed to become champion. He's a massive loss to the series.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

FAMILY FAVOURITE

I loved reading about that old Citroën in your used car pages of 19 February. It triggered cherished nostalgic memories for me, because I was brought up on these cars. Thank you.

I was only four in 1952, when my car enthusiast dad bought a second-hand black Light 15 (HEH 59) from Procters of Longton. He immediately put Michelin X tyres on it, as he did with his later ones, and he regularly did about 30,000-odd miles a year through the 1950s in pursuit of his own business. I don't recall his Citroëns ever breaking down, but maybe a young lad wouldn't. I do remember that he was always very proud of the way he could get his Citroëns to make those tyres last close to a year. No wonder the world eventually went radial!

I'll always remember HEH 59 for its unusual gearleaver sticking out from the dashboard, which none of my mate's dad's cars had. And it also had a little turn wheel at the bottom middle of the windscreen to move the bottom forward a bit to give cooling in the summer. We all loved that pre-air-con breeze on a hot day.

In 1954, Dad bought a new grey Light 15 (JLM 165), again through Procters. Aged six, I had a very exciting day off school when I went with him down to collect it from the Slough assembly plant. If I remember rightly, this one had the modified bigger boot, no longer with the outline of the spare wheel on the lid. Then in 1956 came another grey car (YVT 295) and in 1959 a red one (WVT 394).

In 1961 and again in 1963, Dad stayed staunchly loyal to Citroën and bought a couple of DS19s. Super as the DS19s were, it was the boyhood excitement of that big bold look of the Light 15s that I remember most.

We were a family of five, and I recall us doing journeys through the night to various parts of the UK in them, sometimes towing our Sprite 14 caravan. The Light 15 was a great family car for us because, it being front-driven, there was no transmission tunnel, so I could lie on the floor while my two sisters top-and-tailed on the back seat. But for a lot of these journeys, I was always too excited to sleep and spent many an hour standing up and peeping over the top of the front seats to watch what was going on. It's no wonder I turned into a car nut!

Clive Webber, via email

SONIC BOOM

Your recent article on the Sonic 1 in-wheel electric motor (News, 22 January) reported that each unit would add 40kg of unsprung weight. I'm just wondering what happens when a car fitted with such meets a British pothole. Will the driver simply be ordering a replacement for a bent wheel or will they be seen alongside the highway, collecting up parts of a motor?

Stephen Wisdom
Via email

HUSH MONEY

Paul Ehrmann asks for a quieter Porsche 911 (19 February). I have a typically noisy 991 and recently test drove a 992 that was fitted with the optional lightweight and noise-insulated glass. It was substantially quieter, so much so that I now consider this a must-have option should I decide to replace my car.

Given that just about every tester of a 911 comments on the high level of road noise, I do wonder why Porsche doesn't make the noise-insulated glass a standard feature in the UK at least. But of course they then wouldn't be able to charge an additional £1151 for it, would they?

Stephen Holliday
Bramber, West Sussex

EAGLE-EYED READER

I enjoy your Road tests revisited column. My attention was drawn to the 1978 Pontiac Firebird Trans-Am in the 19 February issue. "A massive V8 under a shaker hood, painted with a golden eagle." It's actually a phoenix, often called a firebird, hence the name.

Rod Baker
Via email

PORSCHE BORE

In John Evans' excellent article on buying a dream used car for less than £30,000 (12 February), I was drawn immediately to the inclusion of the 997-series Porsche 911.

A significant error crept into the narrative. Cylinder bore scoring and IMS bearing failure have been much debated within the Porsche community. They sometimes but rarely occur on 996 and early 997 cars, resulting in scrapped engines. But you illustrated the possibility of buying a bargain 997 with a 997.2, introduced in late 2008. This revised and heavily re-engineered version gained a new, direct injection engine, which gave better performance coupled with lower fuel consumption and, most importantly, banished the bore scoring and IMS bearing problems.

As the proud and happy owner of a 997.2, I would encourage anyone thinking of buying one of these amazing cars to do so quickly, as prices are rising and won't stay at bargain levels for long. My advice is to buy only a post-2008 car with a PDK 'box, for the reasons described.

Stuart Crewe
Cheltenham, Gloucestershire

Bore scoring can affect both the 997.1 and 997.2. IMS bearing failure is very rare on the 997.2 but has been known. Remove the grease seal to be sure – JE

We should've asked Bill Oddie for help identifying this one

CAR SPOTS AUS

Buy a 997.2 911 and road noise may well be your only worry

RIDING HY

Please forgive me for a bit of trumpet-blowing, but your story about the hydrogen-fuelled Lexus buggy ('Dish the dirt', 5 February) reminded me of a similar machine now lurking in the back of a shed up here in rural Lancashire.

Several years ago, as part of a wider gas engine development programme, the Oaktec/Cage Technologies engineering team developed several hydrogen-fuelled single-cylinder engine prototypes. They worked so well that we decided to demonstrate the technology in a Rage Buggy platform that we had developed with support from the Niche Vehicle Network to showcase a previous biogas concept engine.

Our engine, based on a 460cc industrial diesel unit, was limited to 3600rpm and only made around 13bhp, displaying little 'rage' as it took the buggy to a heady 30mph.

It also had no more than 11 miles of range from its small hydrogen tank, highlighting a problem for hydrogen-fuelled ICE vehicles.

Still, it proved the practical potential of ultra-clean hydrogen engines and showcased the talent

Paul is rightly proud of the 'Cage rage'

of our very clever engineers, whose previous vehicle and engine project was the 850bhp TVR Speed 12.

After a few public appearances and demonstrations in 2019, the project became an unfortunate victim of Covid just as it was about to hit the limelight. It was due to be used as a flag-waving centrepiece for the launch of the Boris Johnson government's net zero policy.

Our happy ending is that the follow-on Cage hydrogen engines are now powering generators that will be delivering diesel-free power to the UK's largest construction project, High Speed 2.

Paul Andrews
CEO, Cage Technologies

PARTS UNKNOWN

The letter entitled 'Range Rover frustration' (19 February) had me nodding in agreement. My Hyundai Ioniq 5 has now been off the road for 10 weeks awaiting a spare part. The latest estimate is "two to three more weeks". If so, that will be *three months* without my main car because a part can't be obtained.

A friend of mine was recently without her Citroën C1 for six weeks for the same reason. I happened to ask another friend what he had planned for the half term, only to be told that he'd hoped to take the kids for some days out but his Mazda was off the road – you've guessed it – awaiting parts, time unspecified.

Like your earlier correspondent experienced, the dealer seems to regard it as just one of those things and isn't that empathetic.

This is becoming a major issue for car owners. I'd like Autocar to investigate and run a feature identifying the best and worst manufacturers in this regard. It's clear to me that one more factor now has to be considered when buying a new car: the availability of spare parts. This used to be just an issue for classic car owners; now it seems to apply to all of us.

Alan Roadley
Burnley, Lancashire

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 12 MARCH

FEATURE

RIVIAN R1T vs NEVADA

We drive this prospering US start-up's electric pick-up truck in the Silver State and unravel the story of the firm's partnership with the VW Group

ROAD TEST

RENAULT 5

After the hype comes the acid test. What's the Car of the Year truly like?

MOTORSPORT

FORMULA 1 SEASON PREVIEW

Lewis Hamilton's prospects at Ferrari and all the other big storylines

EVERY WEEK

MY CAR & I

CATERHAM SEVEN SUPERLIGHT R

A 220bhp, 485kg track weapon its owner drives in all weathers

LIVING WITH A...

VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN

Family SUV begins its daily charm offensive on us. Will it make us see beyond its generic looks?

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Circulation enquiries: Frontline Ltd, 1st Floor, Stuart House, St John's Street, Peterborough, PE1 5DD (01733 555161). Printed by William Gibbons, Wolverhampton. Registered as a newspaper with the Royal Mail. Member of the ABC. ISSN 1355-8293.

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FIRST DRIVES

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time - either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 19.2.25, BUSAN, SOUTH KOREA **DELIVERIES** MAY

HYUNDAI IONIQ 9

Here comes another upmarket seven-seat SUV with a calm and cosseting ambience and a long-range electric powertrain

Between being unveiled in concept form in 2021 and reaching production, Hyundai's newest SUV grew. Not literally but figuratively: the Seven became the Ioniq 9, an adjustment intended to crown the large six- or seven-seater as the flagship of the Korean firm's electric range (and possibly to ensure parity with sister brand Kia's related EV9...).

Given how many car makers have stumbled on nomenclature when trying to add EVs into their already bulging line-ups (yes, Audi, we're looking at you), credit to Hyundai for the pre-emptive minor course adjustment. And in its size, ambition and lashings of premium splendour, this car feels every inch the king of Hyundai's 'chess piece' Ioniq family.

That approach refers to Hyundai's determination to give each Ioniq model a distinct character. Sure enough, park the 9 next to the 5 and 6 and only the badge and details such as the pixel light graphics would give away how closely related they are.

Perhaps most gratifyingly, in this age of amorphous electric blobs, the Ioniq 9 has a style of its own. It's definitely an SUV, but there are distinct notes of MPV and estate in its side profile and rear design. It's a classic case of form follows function, with Hyundai's design team aiming both to maximise interior space and make a 2.6-tonne, 5m-long SUV as aerodynamic as it can possibly be. As a neat by-product, it also appears smaller than it actually is.

Look closely and you will spot a sculpted underbody, active air shutters, a wake-reducing rear end, aerodynamically honed alloy wheels and a Formula 1-esque Coke-bottle design.

All this means the Ioniq 9 has a drag coefficient of 0.26 (0.27 if you opt for actual door mirrors rather than digital items, as most buyers are likely to), which is impressive for its size. For comparison, it's substantially more aerodynamic than both the smaller Ioniq 5 (0.29) and equivalent EV9 (0.28).

The Ioniq 9 is based on the Hyundai Motor Group's E-GMP platform, and while there will be three powertrain options at launch, all will be fitted with the same 110.3kWh battery (whose total and usable capacities are slightly bigger than the EV9's).

Because the platform has an 800V electrical architecture, the battery can be charged at speeds ▶

TESTER'S NOTE

In what feels like a sign of the development of this car starting in Covid times, a small storage tray at the base of the dash features a UV-C steriliser that can kill germs on small items such as my phone and wallet. **JA**

> **"It offers amiable and relaxing if somewhat unremarkable transport"**

◂ of up to 350kW, and there's a vehicle-to-load outlet in the boot.

The entry-level Long Range RWD model uses a single 215bhp motor on the rear axle and offers a headline-grabbing official range of 385 miles. The Long Range AWD adds a 94bhp motor on the front axle, while the range-topping Performance AWD tested here uses a pair of 215bhp motors, giving maximum system outputs of 429bhp and 516lb ft, for a 0-62mph time of 5.2sec and a range of around 315 miles.

UK specifications and pricing have yet to be finalised, but expect entry-level models to start from about £60,000, rising to just over £70,000 for the Performance AWD. There are likely to be two trim levels, Ultimate and Calligraphy (Ultimate as the base spec? I know, but let's just roll with it).

Seven seats will be standard, but in Calligraphy trim you can opt to turn the Ioniq 9 into a six-seater by swapping the second-row bench for a pair of plush seats that can swivel 180deg when stationary to turn the rear into a proper mobile lounge.

Yes, promising an EV with a 'mobile lounge' interior has become a bit of a car design cliché, but the Ioniq 9 really does get close to it. Thanks to that elongated roofline it's properly vast in there, especially with the large panoramic roof letting in so much light.

My test car came in six-seat form. There was plentiful head and leg room in both the second and third rows, and gosh is it comfortable back there.

It also had large touchscreens for the second-row seats (unlikely to be offered in the UK sadly), and at a coffee stop I dutifully climbed in the back to film a video for social media – of me streaming the Autocar YouTube channel on the screen, naturally. Through a combination of supportive seats, jet lag and Matt Prior's dulcet tones, it would have been oh so easy to nod off...

Even with the rearmost seats in place, there's a large 620-litre boot; fold them down and there's 1323 litres of cargo capacity.

It's plenty spacious and comfortable up front, too. The driving position is commanding and high, and with the sculpted bonnet and flat rear end, visibility is good all round.

The dashboard will be familiar to anyone who has driven a new Hyundai recently, with the touchscreen and digital instrument display complemented by a decent array of physical buttons and steering wheel controls.

The infotainment system is the latest version of that offered on other Ioniqs, and it's well thought through: particularly pleasing was the remaining range indicator, which showed average but also best- and worst-case scenarios.

There's a large centre console between the front seats and plenty of storage space. The materials used for the interior trim all feel good quality and there's a fancy Bose stereo system. Much like the EV9, you can see the Ioniq 9 turning some heads among potential buyers of more prestigiously badged SUVs.

The Ioniq 9 has a MacPherson-strut front and a multi-link rear, with the suspension tuned for the extra EV weight. There are also self-levelling dampers and a chassis

Ioniq 9 has a less overtly SUV-like shape than its Kia EV9 relation

Comfort, space, tech and pleasant materials are all in abundance

DON'T CALL IT GREENWASHING

Diana Kloster, head of Hyundai's colour team, says inspiration for the Ioniq 9's exterior paints and interior trim designs came from nature. That includes trying to use as many natural and sustainable materials as possible. Indeed, every internal touchpoint of the Ioniq 9 is available in a sustainable material. Please suspend my cynicism here…

"I get a bit angry when people pop up and say it's greenwashing," says Kloster. "My gosh: we're really trying to do what's right. But sustainability isn't a destination, it's a journey."

Part of the challenge is the extensive approval process for using new materials in production cars. Kloster recalls that when she first arrived at Hyundai, it had yet to approve Alcantara, "even though it's in every Lamborghini".

Renewable materials that have made it into the Ioniq 9 include bamboo pigments for the interior, while Kloster is proud of the use of recycled aluminium in the bumpers and recycled end-of-life tyres being mixed into the exterior paint.

control system featuring dynamic torque vectoring and wind stability control to help smooth the ride out.

Hyundai says the intent was to deliver a "luxurious and refined" drive, and it delivers well on that score. The Performance powertrain enables it to accelerate faster than you would expect of a 2.6-tonne car and the power delivery is calm and linear. This isn't a particularly dynamic car to drive, but it's not really intended to be: the king is far from the most dynamic piece on a chess board, after all.

The ride is notably calm and unflustered, although I was driving a Korean-spec car on relatively smooth Korean roads. Past experience suggests it will face a tougher test to maintain similar composure when it reaches the UK. But it certainly feels like it will offer amiable and relaxing if somewhat unremarkable transport.

The steering is light and direct but not tremendously engaging. When I found a faster flowing road, the Ioniq 9 didn't lose all composure when being chucked into corners, but that's clearly not what it's designed for. Still, given its size it was impressively easy to thread down the narrow, hilly streets of urban Busan.

Particularly impressive was the isolation of the cabin, thanks to active noise-cancelling, sound-absorbing tyres and acoustic glass. Sadly, on occasion that peace was interrupted by some of the ADAS functions, in particular an especially over-sensitive forward collision alert.

My test route featured extensive motorway and urban running, giving a pretty realistic feel of its real-world range. The Ioniq 9 averaged 3mpkWh in largely sub-zero conditions – a decent return, considering its size, suggesting a real-world range of close to 300 miles. When I first drove the top-spec dual-motor EV9 in similar conditions in Scotland a year or so back, it struggled to beat 2mpkWh.

The Ioniq 9 is helped in this regard by both a new heat pump designed to recycle waste heat and an HVAC system that will automatically deactivate for the second and third rows if the car detects nobody is back there.

There's still a dearth of options in the market for seven-seat electric SUVs, and the Ioniq 9 certainly feels a strong contender. It's set to undercut both the EV9 (by a bit) and the Volvo EX90 (by quite a lot) while offering a fresh take on a premium-leaning formula.

JAMES ATTWOOD

Seven seats are standard; our car had the optional pair of second-row chairs

TECH SPEC

HYUNDAI IONIQ 9 PERFORMANCE AWD

Big, spacious and comfortable, with enough interior appeal to make up for stolid dynamics

Price £70,000 (est)
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 429bhp
Torque 516lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2600kg
0-62mph 5.2sec
Top speed 124mph
Battery 110.3kWh (usable)
Range, economy 315 miles, 2.9mpkWh (est)
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals Kia EV9, Volvo EX90, VW ID Buzz LWB

> “It absorbs impacts and undulations without the brittleness or floatiness that plagues some rivals”

TESTER’S NOTE
The iX continues to handle its regen strength automatically. Control over the process for the sake of engagement with the drivetrain would arguably elevate its driving appeal. **GK**

TESTED 11.2.25, BARCELONA, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** MARCH

BMW iX

Changes to chassis and EV tech promise superior driving and for longer

The BMW iX has always been a conservation starter, whether you love it, hate it or simply don’t know what to make of it. Its mash-up of estate, crossover and SUV styling hasn’t stopped generating remarks since its introduction back in 2021 – and that’s before you get to its oversized grille, an even bigger lightning rod for opinion.

Yes, the iX is still controversial – but instead of caving to critics and moving to comprehensively rework the looks of its flagship electric SUV with this mid-life facelift, BMW is defiantly serving up more of the same, with just a few stylistic refinements accompanying the mechanical and digital changes.

The grille receives a finer surround to soften its impact but continues with optional illumination; the headlights keep the same shape but borrow a graphic signature from BMW’s Neue Klasse concept cars; and there are subtle changes to the front and rear bumpers, altered tail-light graphics and a fresh range of wheels ranging from 20in to 22in. Nothing radical. More a precision massage than full surgery.

Inside, the iX continues to feel luxurious and special some two and a half years after its launch – even more when specified with the new M Sport package, which brings a special new round steering wheel in place of the standard octagonal item, more heavily sculpted front sports seats for added support, an anthracite-coloured headliner and a two-tone digital instrument panel.

The roomy cabin remains a key draw, blending concept car design touches with production car practicality. It’s not perfect, though. Certain elements, including the sills, lower centre console and other parts, feature a cheap hard black plastic whose perceived quality is totally at odds with the more premium materials used elsewhere.

A flat floor raises the seating position, giving the interior an open and spacious feel. The iX offers a good deal more accommodation than its ICE equivalent, the X5, both front and rear. At 500 litres, however, the boot continues to offer less space than electric rivals like the Mercedes-Benz EQE SUV.

BMW has upped the standard kit. Heated seats and a Harman Kardon sound system now come with every model, alongside the latest OS 8.5 iDrive system. The updated touchscreen infotainment features fresh graphics, reworked menus, improved voice commands and a new suite of entertainment options, including various gaming and video streaming apps.

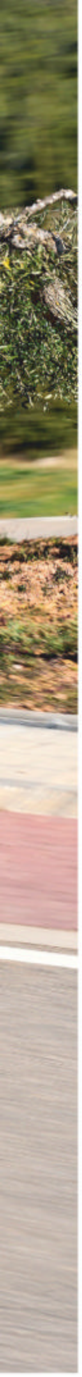
There are new model names, too. In line with upgrades to their drivetrains, the xDrive40 and xDrive50 are now the xDrive45 and xDrive60, while the M60 xDrive makes way for the M70 xDrive (see right).

The additional motor power comes via upgrades to the power electronics and inverters (while the electrical architecture remains at 400V). The xDrive45 delivers 402bhp, an increase of 80bhp on its predecessor that results in a claimed 1.0sec cut in its 0-62mph time, at 5.1sec. The xDrive60 brings a more modest increase of 20bhp, raising its peak to 536bhp without any change in its predecessor’s 0-62mph time, at 4.6sec.

Meanwhile, the adoption of new cell technology has increased the energy density of the iX’s battery by up to 30%, resulting in improvements in range. The xDrive45’s usable capacity grows by 23.8kWh to 94.8kWh, giving it a significant 110-mile boost in range over the old xDrive40, while the xDrive60’s is up by 3.9kWh to 109.1kWh, adding 44 miles of range.

A maximum DC charging rate of 175kW for the xDrive45 and 195kW for the xDrive60 is below par for the class, but the iX manages its charging strategy well, providing a 10-80% charge in 34 minutes for the former and 35 minutes for the latter.

The upgraded drivetrains make light work of the iX’s substantial weight. Even in xDrive45 form, there’s more than 500lb ft of torque, and it’s smooth and urgent under acceleration. You sense the lift in performance in the base model more than in the xDrive60.



Sport trim brings a new round wheel, which is embellished further in M Sport models

The iX is super-quiet, with powertrain, wind and road noise all terrifically well isolated from the cabin. This all sets up a truly serene driving experience.

It also remains one of the more dynamically adept electric SUVs, offering plenty of handling prowess when the roads get twisty. A low centre of gravity, a superbly damped suspension (now with air springs as standard at the rear on all models) and a fast-acting four-wheel drive system provide sharp responses, strong and predictable resistance to body roll and plenty of grip. There's an inviting lightness and more than a modicum of feel to the steering, too.

The best bit, though, is the ride. The double-wishbone front and five-link rear suspension, paired with rear air springs, smooth out bumps with impressive composure and fluid control, absorbing sharper impacts and larger undulations without the brittleness or floatiness that plagues some rivals.

The iX isn't your typical luxury electric SUV: it's bold and unconventional. And there's a lot to like about it. Whether weaving through city streets or stretching on the open road, it's very responsive and remarkably agile for something so heavy while simultaneously quiet and comfortable.

GREG KABLE

TECH SPEC

BMW iX xDRIVE45 SPORT

Some interior elements continue to lack a bit of quality, but the iX is now a more capable, more efficient and more refined EV than before

Price £75,305
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 402bhp
Torque 516lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2450kg
0-62mph 5.1sec
Top speed 124mph
Battery 100.6/94.8kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 375 miles, 3.5mpkWh
CO$_2$, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals Audi Q6 E-tron Quattro, Mercedes-Benz EQE 500 SUV, Polestar 3 Dual Motor

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TESTED 11.2.25 BARCELONA, SPAIN **DELIVERIES** MARCH

BMW iX M70

M division has been hard at work too

PRESS THE START button and the iX M70 xDrive comes to life in an unsettling silence. There's no transient electric hum from beneath, just a lifeless stillness, broken only by the glow of the instrument and infotainment displays confirming it's ready to go.

This range-topping iX isn't a full-blown M car but an M Performance offering. With a combined 650bhp (the same as the i7 M70 xDrive electric saloon), it's also BMW's most powerful electric SUV yet, delivering 40bhp more than the iX M60 xDrive that it replaces.

That increase comes courtesy of updated power electronics and a revised inverter system. But it's not just about chasing headline figures: these drivetrain tweaks are aimed at sharpening throttle response and enhancing power delivery.

As with its predecessor, the two motors – one at each axle – deliver a formidable 749lb ft of torque in the Sport driving mode. That's enough to launch this 2580kg machine from 0-62mph in 3.8sec. Top speed? Still electronically limited to 155mph.

There are no big gains in outright performance, then, despite the power bump – but the iX M70 was already as fast as any heavyweight SUV needs to be.

Throttle response is razor-sharp and power surges effortlessly when it's given the space to stretch.

Dig into the newly upgraded infotainment system and you will find the sound generator, its Hans Zimmer-composed theatrical soundtrack rising and falling in sync with your throttle inputs.

M Performance makeover is subtle; facelift enhances screen

There's more: BMW's M division has tuned the air springs, adaptive dampers and anti-roll bars, keeping the car's considerable mass impressively in check and its engagement suitably high.

The uniquely calibrated four-wheel drive system delivers a rear-biased feel, adding agility and playfulness that sets it apart from other iXs. No, it's not an M4 CSL in terms of handling fluidity, but for a luxury electric SUV its dynamic ability is quite remarkable.

The ride? Firm but relatively composed on anything less than badly broken bitumen, even on the standard 22in wheels and 275/40-profile tyres.

BMW claims a range of up to 365 miles, aided by a slight boost in usable battery capacity to 108.9kWh, although predictably you won't get near that if you use anything close to the full performance of the potent powertrain. You'll have fun, though.

GREG KABLE

TECH SPEC

BMW iX M70 XDRIVE

Supremely fast, hugely capable and fittingly luxurious. A level above other iXs in terms of performance, dynamics and overall appeal

Price £114,205
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 650bhp
Torque 749lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2580kg
0-62mph 3.8sec
Top speed 155mph
Battery 111.5/108.9kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 365 miles, 3.0mpkWh
CO$_2$, tax band 0g/km, 2%
Rivals Lotus Eletre S, Mercedes-AMG EQE 53 SUV, Porsche Macan Turbo Electric

“One of those big-hitting diesel SUVs of old would hit it for six in terms of accessible performance”

TESTED 25.2.25, OXFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

MERCEDES-AMG GLE 53 HYBRID

Six-cylinder performance version of big luxury SUV gains a PHEV sibling

‘Roll up, roll up, folks, for your free plug-in hybrid.’ That very much seems to be the selling tactic for this, the new mid-range AMG performance version of the Mercedes-Benz GLE luxury SUV. Well, sort of.

The new GLE 53 Hybrid slots into the GLE line-up between the mild-hybrid six-cylinder GLE 53 and the full-fat, turbo-V8 GLE 63 S in every way but on price. Mercedes UK has opted to charge less than £200 more for it than for the regular GLE 53 on which it’s based: a premium entirely at odds with the way most PHEVs are positioned and so negligible to someone paying in excess of £90,000 for a fast luxury SUV as to be effectively non-existent.

None of us would be naive enough to think you might actually be getting something for nothing here, though, would we? On the face of it, it might look like that, but Mercedes UK has actually added five figures to the asking price of the regular non-PHEV GLE 53 since the pre-facelifted version went off sale in 2023. So it’s a conceivable supposition that the company is using the standard car to subsidise the new PHEV version or perhaps deliberately sweetening the latter’s asking price in order to boost its popularity for strategic commercial reasons.

The GLE 53 Hybrid uses the same powertrain as the youthful E53 super-saloon, so it’s primarily powered by the same 3.0-litre twin-turbo straight six as the GLE 53 but with that engine working a little harder to produce an extra 13bhp. It’s partnered with a 134bhp electric motor upstream of the nine-speed multi-clutch automatic gearbox, which in turn draws power from a nickel-manganese-cobalt battery of a little over 30kWh in capacity, immediately above the rear axle.

Look a little closer at the technical spec, however, and you may note that the GLE 53 Hybrid’s fuel tank is some 20 litres smaller than that of the GLE 53. This is a factor worth remembering for those with higher mileages in mind, because a large PHEV SUV like this (it typically returns about 25mpg in battery-depleted motorway running) will still go a lot further on 20 litres of unleaded than on a fully charged battery (worth between 40 and 45 real-world miles in this case).

Heavy battery and big wheels counteract what good the air springs do

TESTER'S NOTE

It's unusual to drive a current Mercedes that still has a touchpad for its multimedia system. This seemed like a funny idea years ago, but exposure to the worst touchscreen interfaces has given me a new appreciation of it. **MS**

Interior is made only modestly sporty – but same is true of the 63 S

The way this big, tall car goes round corners won't excite you all that much

If you have mixed short- and long-range use in mind with plenty of charging possible, the picture will of course look entirely different and that electrification may well be worth having.

Still, the GLE 53 Hybrid is a whacking great 425kg heavier than the GLE 53 – a fact we will come back to in a moment. But it's nonetheless 0.3sec quicker from rest to 62mph and within 1.0sec of the GLE 63 S on the same measure.

Could this be all the fast, multi-faceted performance SUV the modern Mercedes owner needs, then? Consider me a little unconvinced.

The engine's slightly waspish, high-register, six-cylinder hum is nice enough, for a start, but still not quite what you expect from a big, bruising performance SUV from Affalterbach. Combined with that electric motor, it makes the car feel assertively brisk on the road and well capable of picking off slower-moving traffic with ease – but still a little way short of anything spectacular. And the motor seems to achieve little to boost the car's responsiveness or drivability. It doesn't seem to torque-fill when the powertrain is caught in the wrong gear, nor add transformative low-RPM, high-ratio thrust when you need it.

On the 22in alloy wheels on which we tested it (a 21in set is the default), the ride was a little clunky and animated on imperfect surfaces, with the standard air suspension making Comfort mode feel a little underdamped, unsteady and unsettled, while in Sport it felt better tied down but quite coarse in its lack of ride isolation.

Its steering, while discreetly communicative, is victim to tramlining and bump steering, especially under braking. On a smooth surface the chassis has its moments, and the way it can corner, in those moments, certainly belies the car's kerb weight. But they're pretty rare and fleeting ones; and, owing to some particularly troubling artificial brake pedal feel, you wouldn't call the all-round driving experience very enticing. Not nearly as much, at any rate, as it ought to be.

It would be great to be able to report on how cleverly Mercedes has disguised all of the GLE 53's extra mass here and hit on a car with all of the extra ownership appeal of silent, cost-effective, emissions-free short-range running; with new-found dimensions of smoothness and refinement when the occasion calls for them; and with true dynamism and AMG-typical hot-rod driver appeal as well. But the truth is that this car is trying to achieve so many often disparate aims – while seeking to reconcile all of them with the versatility and good manners you expect of a luxury SUV – that it doesn't succeed particularly convincingly at any of them.

There's little worth savouring about its handling; it doesn't get close to a really demonstrative V8 for blood-and-thunder dramatic appeal; and one of those sadly defunct, big-hitting diesel SUVs of a decade or so ago would have hit it for six in terms of effortless, accessible, real-world performance.

In light of all that, 40-something miles of EV running seems pretty scant compensation, even if it does appear to come 'for free'.

MATT SAUNDERS

TECH SPEC

MERCEDES-AMG GLE 53 HYBRID 4MATIC+ PREMIUM

Offers decent refinement and electric range but lacks particular sporting drama or dynamic appeal

★★★☆☆

Price £94,360
Engine 6 cyls in line, 2999cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 537bhp
Torque 553lb ft
Gearbox 9-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2725kg
0-62mph 4.7sec
Top speed 155mph
Battery 31.2kWh (total)
Economy 217.3mpg
Electric range 55 miles
CO_2, tax band 30g/km, 8%
Rivals BMW XM 50e, Porsche Cayenne Turbo eHybrid, Range Rover Sport P550e

ROAD TEST

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GTS

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5731

PORSCHE 911

Has hybrid power sullied the purity of Porsche's hallowed sports car?

MODEL TESTED
PORSCHE 911 CARRERA GTS
Price £132,600
Power 534bhp
Torque 450lb ft
0-60mph 2.8sec
30-70mph 2.6sec
Top speed 194mph (claimed)
Average economy 24.5mpg
Electric range na
CO_2 emissions 244g/km
70-0mph 38.9m (8deg C, dry)

Seismic changes are rare in Porsche 911 world. Gentle evolution has been the cornerstone of the car's era-spanning appeal, and big changes to the recipe have been avoided in the design-engineering workshops at Weissach as well as the boardroom at Zuffenhausen. A bit of water-cooling here, a turbo or two there, rear-axle steering to counteract growth in the footprint and, all right then, a two-pedal GT3.

The adoption of innovation has been subtle, yet for more than a decade one unswervable shake-up has hovered above the world's best-loved sports car – a machine famed for its lightness, litheness and purity – like a regulation-driven sword of Damocles: electrification.

That the 911 would eventually 'go hybrid' has long been accepted as fact. Equally accepted, and most certainly feared, has been the idea that the plumbing of electrical apparatus into an already tightly packaged chassis would add weight and trim the 911's natural vivacity.

In the 15 fleeting years since Porsche revealed the radical 911 GT3 R Hybrid racing car, with its 40,000rpm flywheel generator dumped adjacent to the driver, and raced it at the 2010 Nürburgring 24 Hours (DNF after 142 laps), we have cogitated on exactly how a hybrid road 911 might adopt electrification while minimising the drawbacks. In these intervening years, the release of the barnstorming PHEV 918 Spyder and totemic victories at Le Mans with the ultra-complex 919 Hybrid spaceship-on-wheels should have allayed reservations about an upcoming street-legal 911 hybrid, but they did no such thing. An attempt to extend the regulatory life of the flat six by electrifying the powertrain could still go wrong. An 1800kg 911 PHEV? No thanks.

But now an official hybrid 911 is finally upon us, and we can say that Porsche evidently shared our concerns. Look around the body of the subject of this road test and you will see a fuel filler cap but no charge port cover, and yet this definitely is a hybrid 911, just not a heavy PHEV. The new Carrera GTS, which is the model selected to introduce Porsche's T-Hybrid (T for Turbo) technology, carries only a small battery pack and two tactically placed electric motors. The system was conceived with the goal of decreasing emissions and future-proofing the flat six while simultaneously escalating performance to levels hitherto unknown to any non-GT or Turbo-badged 911, all while not straying beyond 1600kg in full running order.

GT3 R race car was a 911 hybrid test bed

This is, on paper, a rather stunning machine. What we will now discover is how well this hybrid complexity translates to the simple joy of driving and, of course, to that trademark day-to-day 911 usability.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★★☆

PROS All-new engine; subtle hybrid integration; traditional weight distribution
CONS Doesn't quite meet 1600kg target; hybrid precludes third pedal

Porsche used to draw attention to the hybrid anatomy of its cars with lime-green details. For the very first hybrid production 911 there are no such gimmicks beyond a small decal on the flank. Little will give the game away to onlookers. The message is clear: the Carrera GTS is a 911 first; hybridness is incidental.

But never mind the internals: onlookers may not even realise this is a new model, so subtle are the design revisions made to the facelifted 911 revealed in 2024. Range-wide updates amount to reprofiled bumpers with horizontal elements that exaggerate the car's width and new headlights that house the daytime-running light component, freeing up space for larger air intakes. The updated GTS is the most easily identifiable car in the line-up, courtesy of its quintet of gill-like blades, but whatever the model, the changes are slight. Still to come in facelifted form is the 911 Turbo, and there's a chance Porsche will release a GT2 RS for the second phase of the 992's lifespan. Expect both to be T-Hybrid creations.

Note also that the Carrera GTS is, as before, also available in Cabriolet and Targa guises, and with four-wheel drive. There is, alas, no manual 'box this time – a shame not only for the mechanical engagement, but for the lack of the lovely open-pore walnut gearknob Porsche has started to offer too.

So to the heart of the matter. To '9A3B6', as it's lovingly known. Porsche describes this 3.6-litre turbocharged flat six as "completely redeveloped", suggesting that rather than being entirely new, it is derived from the 3.0-litre twin-turbo unit that has served in the 911 since the Carrera went to forced induction in 2015. The extra capacity is the result of the bore increasing from 91.0mm to 97.0mm and stroke rising from 76.4mm to 81.0mm. This engine has new internals and mounts, a more compact intake manifold and cylinder heads, and it uses more direct-acting finger followers for the valvetrain – the old engine's VarioCam Plus variable valve lift is no longer required. The crankshaft counterweights are also lighter.

It generates 479bhp of the GTS's hybrid-enhanced total output of 534bhp (the previous GTS made ▶

■ Gills have divided opinion in terms of their aesthetics but Porsche says these active flaps optimise the car's aero by closing when less power is required, and funnel air to the rads when you're asking more of the GTS.

■ Wheel diameter is no larger than on the pre-facelift GTS and centre-locking alloys are still standard fare, but the contact patch is 10mm wider at the back (it remains the same at the front) – a result of taking the GTS beyond 500bhp.

■ Exhaust tips aren't nestled as closely – or as elegantly – together as they are on the GT3 but still hint that this is a more special variety of 911. The numberplate is apparently mounted higher than before too.

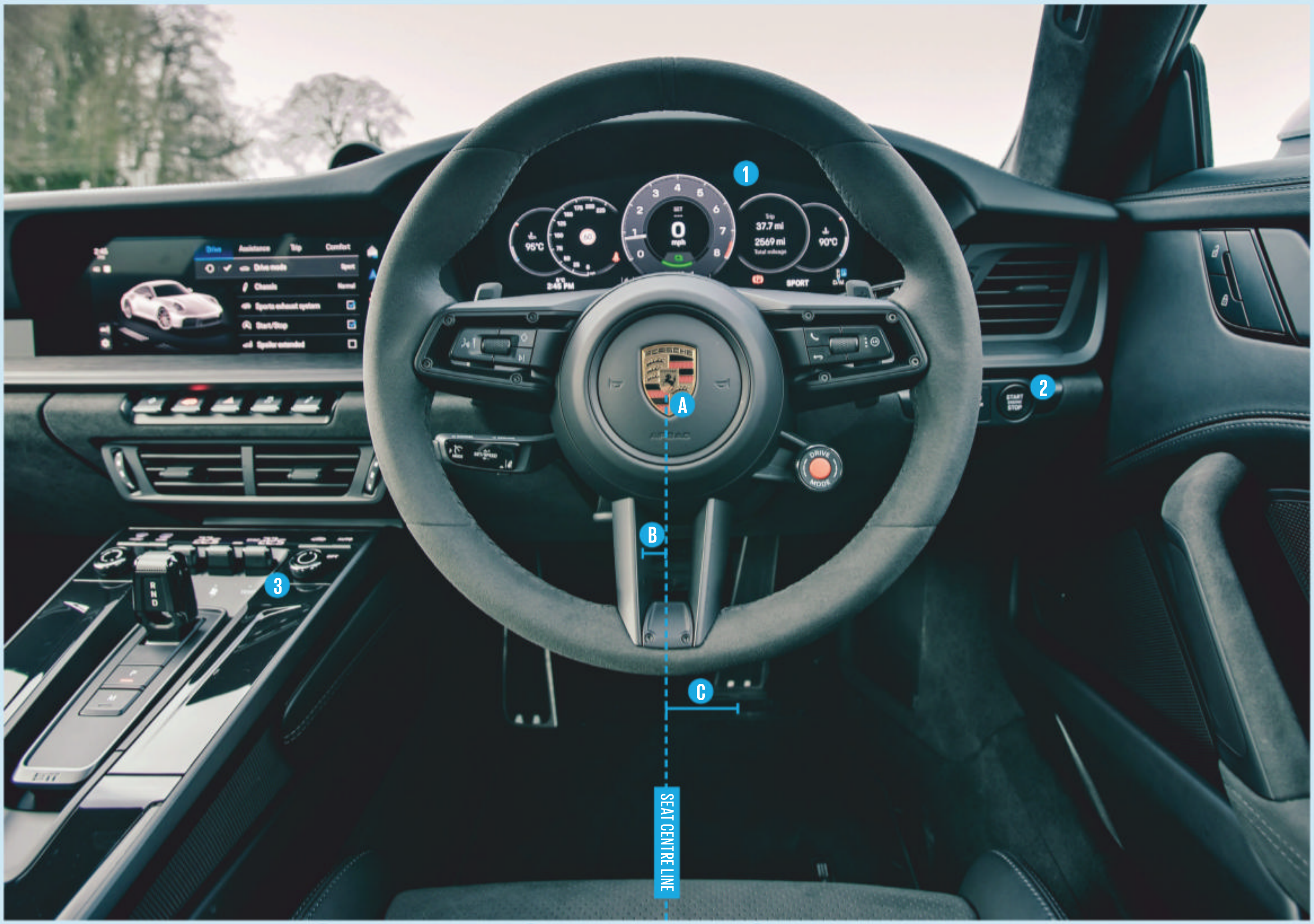
■ Engine bay is business-like as usual and not as exciting as in most rivals, showing only the fans that evacuate hot air from around the flat six, which sits deep below. However, an extra £483 will get you a central carbonfibre '911' plaque.

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① Instrument binnacle is purely digital for the first time in more than six decades of 911 history, and lacks some romance. It's crystal-clear, mind, and you can elect to have the 7000rpm marker at 12 o'clock, racing car-style.

② It's been a while since the 911 featured a proper turn-key start, and the previous car's vestigial rotating switch has also now been consigned to history (except for in the GT3). The 911 now conforms with a simple engine-start button.

③ Toggle switches offer quick control over the dampers, exhaust and ESP, and beneath them sit physical switches for the climate control. Overall there's a sensible balance of proper switchgear and digital interactions.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 30mm left Ⓒ Accelerator offset 80mm right. Pedal box is fairly central, allowing for left-foot braking should you so wish. Equally, for day-to-day work the driving position is perfectly intuitive and all-round visibility good.

◂ 473bhp). The 400V electrical circuit also means the unit can do without a belt drive and starter motor, and so despite being larger than the 3.0-litre twin-turbo on which it is loosely based, the 3.6-litre stands 110mm shorter.

The T-Hybrid element takes a form similar to what we have seen in so-called mild-hybrid applications (Formula 1 too). A Varta-made, rapid-cycling lithium ion battery supplies power to (and takes recuperative energy from) a motor inside the eight-speed PDK and another within the turbo housing, leveraging know-how from the 919. There's more detail in 'Technical focus' (right), but note that the T-Hybrid set-up doesn't give the Carrera GTS pure-EV driving ability.

What's interesting is that peak boost has risen from 1.2 bar in the old twin-turbo motor to 1.8 bar here. So why does power from the ICE take only a tiny hike? Answer: to comply with 'Lamda 1' regulations in Germany. To minimise exhaust emissions, a perfect fuel-air mix is required at all points in the engine's scope (rather than running rich on full throttle at the top end, for that bit of extra 'go'). The new engine achieves this; the old one didn't.

The T-Hybrid bits are said to add 50kg to the package. Our test car, which has optional lightweight seats and glass, trod the scales at 1607kg with its 63-litre tank full. This beats the claimed weight of 1645kg but is nearly 100kg more than the pre-facelift Carrera S we tested in 2019 (fitted with rear steer, front-axle lift and rear seats, so no weight-weeny). At the same time, the GTS undercuts the Ferrari 296 GTB PHEV supercar we tested in 2022 by 31kg and the current, non-hybrid Aston Martin Vantage by more still. Even in hybrid form, the 911 remains at the lighter end of the spectrum.

Elsewhere, the contact patch has grown over the previous Carrera GTS, if only at the back, and the 911 that in theory takes you halfway to GT3-level vigour still has helper springs on the rear struts of its 10mm-shorter-than-standard suspension, though the adaptive Bilstein dampers are faster-acting than before. Rear steer is standard this time too. The GTS can also have active anti-roll bars (PDCC), now powered directly by the hybrid system and even faster-actuating, though our test car went without.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Racy when you want it, comfy when you don't; fine ergonomics
CONS Piano black plastic; tacho is now digital and lacks romance

There's relatively little new to report from inside the cabin. Depending on what you option, you might be treated to some new textures and surfaces, but this remains a solidly wrought, ergonomically superb, light-filled environment and one that exhibits Porsche's particular sport-luxe approach better than any other model in the company's range. Those of a more track-day bent can option the carbon-backed buckets from the GT3, lots of Race-Tex (Porsche's take on Alcantara) and a fire extinguisher, all of which are seen on our test car, while anybody who sees their GTS as more of a super-GT can have truffle-brown leather and so on. One thing all 911s of this generation have in common is the evocative view over the scuttle, and down the road through the peaks of the fenders. And gratifyingly heavily sprung door handles that can pinch the skin on your palm if you're not careful.

One interesting thing to note is that Porsche now offers the 911 as a pure two-seater. You need to specify rear seats if you would like them, and we recommend that you do, if not for their ability to cart children along with you, then for the added insulation they bring from the roaring rear tyres, or the neat luggage deck they provide when folded. In short, worth having.

We may mourn the loss of the analogue tachometer, but it is made slightly easier by Porsche's digital tech working flawlessly. The gauge cluster has a number of layouts to choose from, and it gives you a lot of choice in terms of which information you want it to display.

The central touchscreen has exceptionally crisp resolution and graphics and responds pretty much instantly. Its menu structure is also logical and easy to use on the move. Both Apple CarPlay and Android Auto work wirelessly and are nicely integrated into the native interface.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

PROS Expectation-defying speed; rorty character; hugely tractable

CONS Top end could be wilder

Now then. We will get on to how the new Carrera GTS and its T-Hybrid powertrain behave on the public road in a moment, but in coldly objective terms, just how rapid do we think a mere rear-driven Carrera can reasonably aspire to be when fired off in a perfectly straight line?

On an overcast day at Horiba MIRA proving ground, our grey test car's launch control programme struggled when grappling with frigid conditions. The fat rear Goodyears would get going with reasonable efficacy but then light up uncontrollably towards the top of first gear, in a way that was tricky to manage. However, once or twice, with a good bit of heat in the mix, the launch control software and torque-vectoring limited-slip diff did their job, the rubber just about held on and the telemetry recorded remarkable acceleration figures.

The quickest 0-60mph time was 2.75sec, which more or less matches the time we set in the 296 ▶

TECHNICAL FOCUS

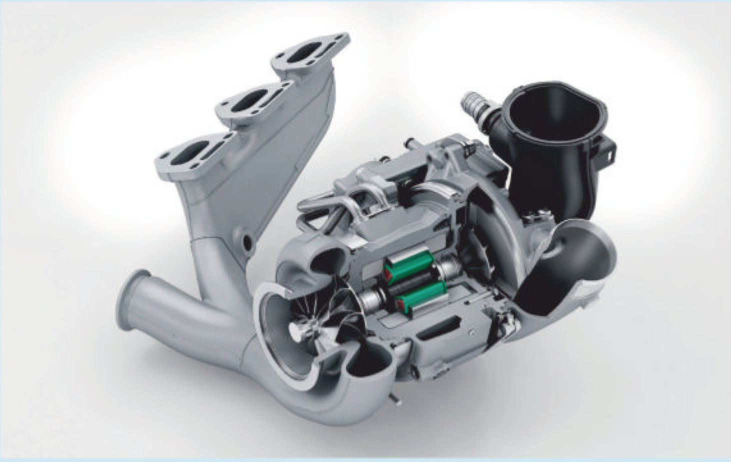
The new T-Hybrid arrangement in the GTS increases overall power and torque through electrification, but even more significantly it lays the ground for the 911 to meet future emissions standards.

Here we have a circa-27kg, 400V battery nestled behind the front luggage compartment, powering an electric motor within the car's large, solitary, 125,000rpm turbocharger (a unit that lurks between the exhaust and compressor turbines) and another motor inside the reinforced PDK gearbox. All-electric running was never the aim, which is why the GTS doesn't have a charge port and why the battery has a capacity of just 1.9kWh. By comparison, the plug-in hybrid Ferrari 296 GTB carries a heftier 7.5kWh unit beneath its narrow parcel shelf. Porsche says that, all in, its electrification of the 911 concept adds only about 50kg.

The e-turbo element of the T-Hybrid system is particularly interesting. The compressor can spool up extraordinarily quickly when given a push by the motor, which can output up to 26bhp. Result: throttle response comparable to that of a naturally aspirated engine, in theory.

There's also no need for a wastegate as the turbo e-motor can decelerate the turbine should pressure in the system spike, with the energy generated (up to 11kW can be extracted from the exhaust gases) fed back to the battery or sent directly to the other motor. It's a clever set-up. 'Nimble' might be a better description, because this lithium ion unit can simultaneously discharge power to the drive motor in the gearbox while recuperating electricity from the e-turbo. There's very little wastage in energy terms.

The 400V system also means there's no old-fashioned starter motor, so when you push the button, the engine fires that instant. With no need for a fan drive for the alternator and AC compressor, the crankcase is also 20% flatter, which creates space for the pulse-controlled inverter feed and the DC/DC converter.



FRONT Leg room 1090mm, head room 1030mm. Driving position remains near-flawless in the 911 and underscores its purpose-built sports car feel.

REAR The GTS comes without rear seats but you can option them at no cost. We would do so, for the added versatility and sound-deadening.

IN THE FRUNK

The presence of the T-Hybrid battery doesn't impinge on luggage space, as you might expect. In fact, the new GTS has three litres more official capacity than its direct forebear, at 135 litres. It's enough to squish down a couple of duffel bags, and there is of course also the space behind the front seats, though it's less accessible if you opt for the heavily sculpted bucket seats.

BOOT Length 400mm, width 700mm, height 430-600mm. The 911 retains its surprisingly large frunk, which is unaffected by the T-Hybrid set-up.

> “Here we have an old-school, giant-slaying Porsche 911”

◀ GTB – a time taken on a warmer day, with simmering Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 R tyres to glue the Ferrari’s backside to the track surface. For any 911 shy of a full-blown Turbo to launch with anything approaching such explosivity is, frankly, jaw-dropping, even with the natural traction advantage of having so much mass behind the rear axle. Triple figures were reached in 6.3sec, at which point the Ferrari is disappearing but the GTS finds itself some 0.7sec ahead of the 656bhp Aston Vantage. Here we have an old-school, giant-slaying Porsche 911.

One more statistic to mull: over a standing kilometre, the GTS is a scant four-tenths slower than the most recent GT2 RS, and trails its fearsome relative by just a tenth from 30-70mph in full kickdown. Given that the GT2 RS needed good conditions and something approaching a semi-slick tyre to generate its numbers, the inference here is that, in the real world, the GTS is a faster machine.

And it is in the real world where this new 3.6-litre T-Hybrid set-up manages, if anything, to make even more of a lasting impression than it does on the telemetry data traces. It’s clear from the outset just how much quicker-spooling this electrically assisted turbo is than the hardly sluggish pair of small, parallel-operating turbos fixed to the 3.0-litre motor (one snail per bank) manage to be. In terms of tip-in, roll-on throttle response, the T-Hybrid can’t quite replicate the feeling of a contemporary naturally aspirated performance car engine, but it does a pretty good impression of, say, an atmo 6.0-litre V12 from the mid-2000s. This is rather a lovely thing. It feels more big-lunged than its 3591cc would suggest, and while the twin-turbo Carreras are hardly dependent on constantly shuffling down their ’boxes to make progress, the hybrid GTS really is ready to sling into the middle distance at any moment. Data: a 2020-model-year Carrera S needs 5.3sec to go from 30-70mph in fourth gear, but the GTS? Just 4.7sec, which is also 0.2sec up on our recorded time for the current Turbo S, only you’re getting sweeter linearity from the full-bodied delivery of this new 3.6.

Porsche has also reinforced its eight-speed PDK for this application

AMG and Aston rivals from the class above can’t beat it on road – and in some ways nor can the GT3

It’s RWD and always raring to go, so exercise caution on wet surfaces

TRACK NOTES ★★★★☆

PROS Exhibits a broad, forgiving window of 911-typical adjustability
CONS Don't expect 911 GT3-level front-axle bite or mid-corner poise

Normally the portlier hybrid variant is the last one you'd choose for a track-day outing but, in the case of the 911, the GTS really is the closest you'll get to enjoying the full GT3 experience without having to shell out for an actual GT3 and also live with its on-road rawness.

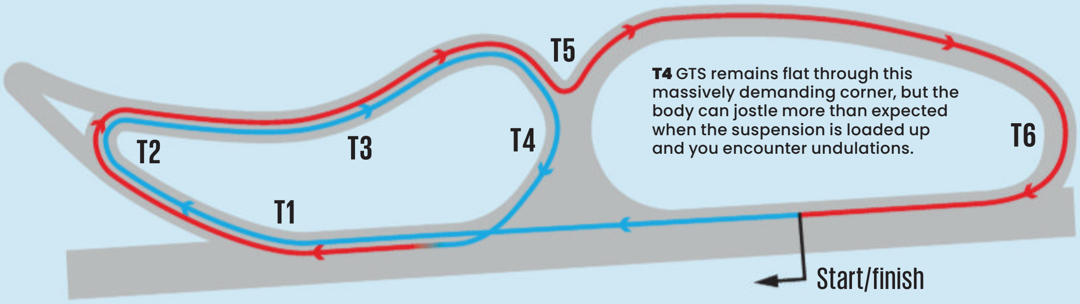
On a cold day, the GTS's new Goodyear Eagle F1 Supersport 'P' tyres needed a good degree of heat in them to properly wake up, but boy could the rewards be reaped once they came on song and that uncomfortable phase of power-on understeer then oversteer was dispensed with. The GTS has a fizzing, thoroughbred character to it on track, with a bit more 'old-school 911' flavour about it than we had expected.

It is ever ready to rotate on a trailing brake but the response of its barrel-chested new 3.6-litre engine inspires confidence when it's time to reopen the throttle and to drive through and out of the corner, sensitively managing any yaw. Where you could just about sense its machinations in the 991-gen GT3, rear-axle steering has now been mastered by Weissach to such an extent that it is nigh-impossible to detect through entry, apex and exit phases on corners of varying speed. The GTS has a rare precision and accuracy.

The cast-iron brake rotors also hold up very well, though carbon-ceramics are an option (we would have them more for the reduction in unsprung mass than anything).

Ultimately, however, the GTS is not a GT3. Its default balance in any situation where it is not being taken truly by the scruff of the neck has a touch of nose-heaviness that Porsche's track-day special comprehensively eschews. You can also sense that extra 150kg the car is carrying, and it almost goes without saying that the granular steering feel and deeply gratifying front-axle bite of the road racer is also absent. And yet, for a couple of track days each year, the politer 911 GTS would give you enormous satisfaction.

HORIBA MIRA HANDLING AND STABILITY CIRCUIT



T4 GTS remains flat through this massively demanding corner, but the body can jostle more than expected when the suspension is loaded up and you encounter undulations.

T2 Tremendous mid-corner grip through this tight bend is followed by 911-typical traction on exit.

T6 Exit of T6 is quick and, if you would like, lairy. In fact, lairy can be the best course of action if the chassis has settled into a sliver of steady-state understeer. A GT3 doesn't do this.

(the GTS still doesn't get the utterly razor-sharp PDK Sport found in the GT3) and it is a dextrous 'box with no drawbacks in terms of low-speed drivability. The gearing remains sensible by modern standards too – second gear redlining at 66mph.

Admittedly, third will take you to 97mph, but the truth is that this 3.6 does its best work in the low and mid ranges of its 7500rpm scope. It's here that its muscularity is most discernible, and also where its beefcake cry – richer, deeper, more gargling, and perhaps less mechanically intricate than anything the Carrera has enjoyed since the model line went turbo – is most enjoyable. It's almost too theatrical, in fact, with a suspicious degree of old-school character. You do wonder whether there might be some artifice at play in the acoustics, but surely not, eh?

As ever, you can vary the baseline character of the powertrain, using the rotary selector that hangs off a spoke on the small steering rim. There is a notable difference between Normal and max-attack Sport Plus, so the GTS needn't have the bit between its teeth at all times. You also have the red button in the middle of the selector. This gives you 20 seconds of all-out response, for those moments when that fast-travelling BMW M3 up ahead is still contriving to hold you up.

On which note, and as we have seen with other high-performance hybrid applications, the T-Hybrid's electrical boost, whether to the turbo or the gearbox motor (a neat graphic shows you what is going where in terms of energy), is ever available. You might just about succeed in depleting the battery with a prolonged hammering of the car on circuit, but on the road we never saw charge drop below about half. Owners need not pay any attention to the hybrid element of the car if it doesn't interest them – it operates quietly in the background.

We should also highlight braking performance. A heavier Carrera the GTS may be, but nothing in the class stops better. Less than 39 metres to pull up from 70mph is close to the level of true track-day lightweights.

RIDE & HANDLING

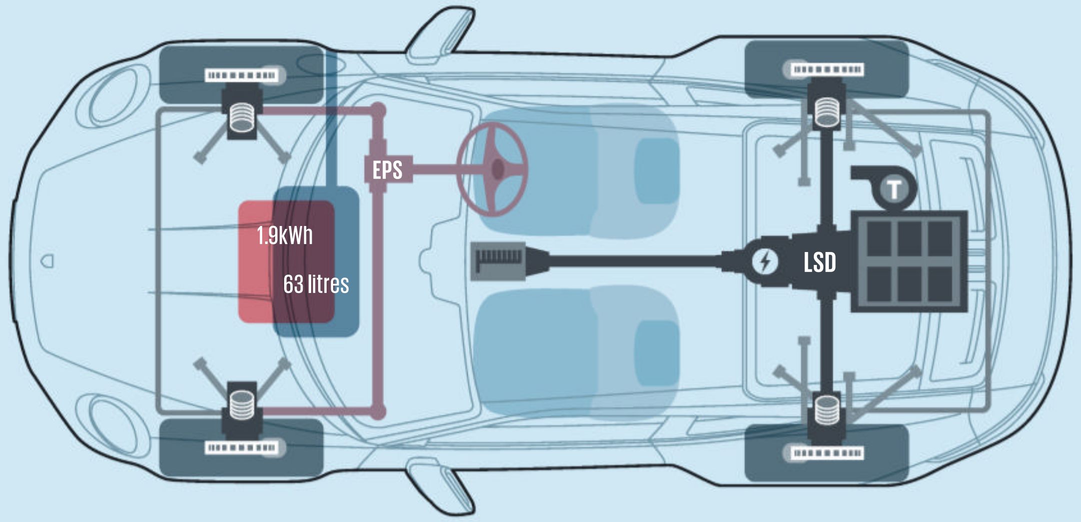
★★★★⯪

PROS More pliant than expected; superb accuracy; not too fighty
CONS RWD car isn't an all-weather hero; still has 911-typical road roar

There's a gritty incisiveness to the way the GTS flits into and through direction changes (helped by truly outstanding vertical body control) that immediately marks it out from lower-ranking Carreras. Equally, the GTS still feels a notch below the epic GT3. For plenty of people, it will duly feel like the sweet spot between outright sports car dynamism and the 911's modern shift into GT territory. Of course, some will find the regular Carrera S silkier everyday company, which it is: on the road, very few will wish they had the added explosive agility and prickly manners of the GT3. The GTS has long been billed as a ▸

Even as a hybrid, the GTS now sprints and brakes like a true track-day lightweight

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION



PORSCHE 911 CARRERA GTS

On-the-road price £132,600
Price as tested £145,543
After 3yrs/36k miles £71,650
Typical PCP £1500 pcm (£28,189 deposit + 35 months/36,000 miles)
Insurance group 50

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard Rear-axle steering, PASM Sport suspension, Torque Vectoring Plus, Sport Chrono package, Sport exhaust, 20/21in Carrera GTS wheels, heated Sports seats Plus, heated GT Sport steering wheel, reversing camera, two-zone climate control, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, 15W wireless phone charger
Selected options Ice Grey paint £1068, bucket seats £4622, tinted HD matrix headlights £2562, lightweight, noise-insulated glass £1151, Bose sound system £1223, fire extinguisher £129
Also available Aerokit £2342, lightweight carbon roof £3071, front-axle lift £2033, Porsche Ceramic Composite Brakes £9087

HYBRID POWERTRAIN

Engine Rear, longitudinal, RWD
Type 6 cyls horizontally opposed, 3591cc, turbocharged, petrol; 479bhp at 6500rpm, 420lb ft at 2000-5500rpm
Made of Aluminium block and head
Bore/stroke 97.0mm/81.0mm
Compression ratio 10.5:1
Valve gear 4 per cyl

TECHNICAL LAYOUT

T-Hybrid set-up adds complexity but doesn't alter the fundamental layout or suspension tech. On paper, the one giveaway of its existence is our test car's weight distribution of 37:63, front to rear – a fraction more nose-heavy than the 36:64 of the 'back-to-basics' 911 T tested in 2023.

Redline 7500rpm
Specific output 133bhp per litre
Motor Permanent magnet synchronous motor, gearbox-mounted; 54bhp, 110lb ft
Battery type LFP
Capacity 1.9kWh (total)
Voltage 400V
Total power 534bhp
Total torque 450lb ft
Power to weight 325bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 274lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 8-spd dual-clutch automatic
Ratios/mph per 1000rpm
1st 4.89/5.7 **2nd** 3.17/8.8 **3rd** 2.15/12.9 **4th** 1.56/17.8 **5th** 1.18/23.5 **6th** 0.94/29.5 **7th** 0.76/36.5 **8th** 0.61/45.5
Final drive ratio 3.02:1
rpm in top at 70/80mph 1537/1757

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel and aluminium monocoque
Weight/as tested 1645kg/1607kg
Drag coefficient 0.27
Weight distribution (f/r) 37%/63%
Wheels 8.5Jx20in (f), 11.5Jx21in (r)
Tyres 245/35 ZR20 (f), 215/30 ZR21 (r), Goodyear Eagle F1 Supersport 'P'
Spare None (mobility foam)

SUSPENSION

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar

STEERING

Type EPAS, rack and pinion
Turns lock to lock 2.5
Turning circle 10.9m

BRAKES

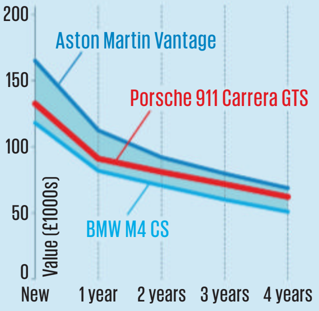
Front 408mm ventilated discs, six-piston calipers **Rear** 380mm ventilated discs, four-piston calipers **Handbrake type** Electronic, switch

SAFETY

Passive measures Two inertia-reel seatbelts; eight airbags
Active systems PSM, AEB, EBD, ABS

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 244g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £818/£1635



DEPRECIATION

GTS bests key rivals, though the BMW is surprisingly strong.

◂ 'GT3-lite' but this time round that really does feel like the reality.

During transitions on circuit you can fairly easily discern the heft of this 1600kg-plus package, but on the road the GTS disguises its mass with the aid of those quicker-acting Bilsteins and rear steering that continues to set the standard in terms of its near-undetectable calibration. This car is fast and cohesive, and the decision to go with rather a light, quick initial steering action is vindicated. This could have felt unnatural in a car of this scale, but it doesn't – it simply invites you to get stuck into the GTS.

In RWD guise, this latest Carrera GTS also has a level of playfulness that seems borrowed from 911s of yesteryear – if not in terms of the raw physics (the nose doesn't bob uncontrollably and the chassis won't stab you in the back on a trailing throttle) then certainly in spirit. The throttle pedal needs to be respected because it can very easily and enjoyably delineate the angle of your view forwards from the direction of the road itself on anything less than a dry surface. The 911's particular weight distribution can also be more readily enlisted for the purposes of subtly changing your angle of mid-corner attack than it can in less highly strung derivatives.

The new GTS has a wider rear tyre than its direct forebear but is a more adjustable car. The only blot in its copybook is steering feel, which is good but doesn't quite communicate grip levels across the front axle with a clarity that feels aligned with the rest of this alert, evocative package.

As for refinement, the GTS is surprisingly pliant given its body control and the substantial wheel-and-tyre package. Ergonomic comfort and visibility are also class-leading but noise remains the 911's chief bugbear. At a 70mph cruise, our test car's 71dBA is equal to that of a Lamborghini Revuelto, even with the Italian supercar's noise-transmitting carbonfibre monocoque and its mammoth 355-section rear Pirellis. Optioning rear seats would help the GTS's cause in this respect, certainly.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Usability in respect to the performance; efficiency; variety
CONS GTS can easily cost £150k with options; GT3 only a bit more

The refreshed 911 range kicks off at just under £100,000, and that's for a Carrera with no options – an idea that only exists in the Porsche configurator, and then only briefly.

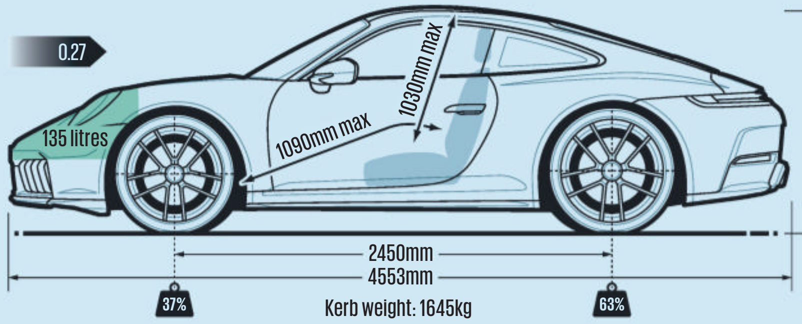
You then move up through the Carrera T and Carrera S (there is no Carrera 4 or 4S quite yet), and their open-top counterparts, until you get to the £132,600 GTS, the most expensive derivative of which is the 4 GTS Cabriolet at £149,100. From there is just a short hop to the realm of the updated 911 GT3, which costs £157,300 whether or not you go for the Touring Package – and, of course, you actually manage to get your hands on one from a dealer.

Given its sheer performance and versatility, the RWD GTS, for a touch over £130k, looks reasonably priced, not least because the upcoming 911 Turbo is likely to cost at least £170,000 but won't be meaningfully quicker in the real world. The GTS also finds itself in clear airspace. Audi no longer makes the R8 and the front-engined alternatives from Mercedes-AMG and Aston Martin are considerably more expensive. In dynamic terms, the Porsche is every bit the match for these more outwardly glamorous cars – and is also a good deal more efficient.

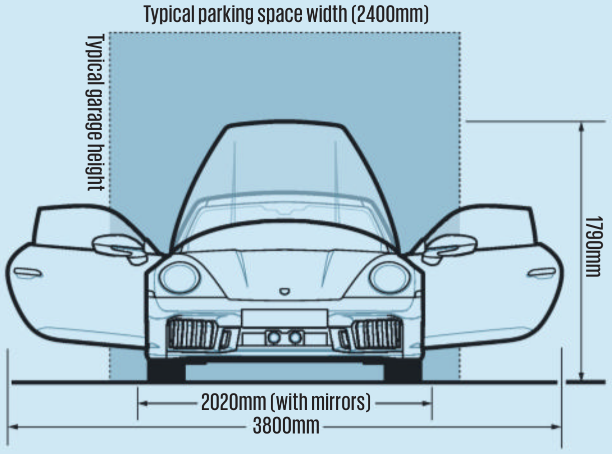
So just how efficient is this car? Our touring economy test returned close to 35mpg, which translates to a motorway range of 475 miles. (Those with touring ambitions will envy their European counterparts, because the left-hand-drive 911 can still be optioned with a supersized 83-litre tank, taking the range to an implausible-sounding 626 miles.) In day-to-day driving expect closer to 33mpg, which is fair going for a car with well in excess of 500bhp and a top speed of 194mph. An Aston Vantage will struggle to get far beyond 25mpg in humdrum use. ▸

TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

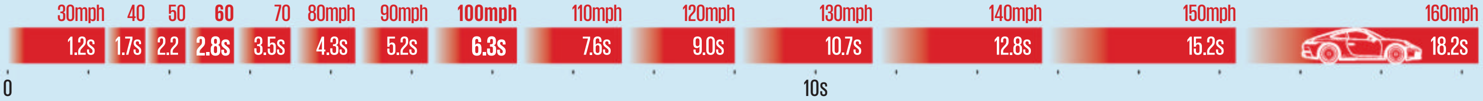

0.27
135 litres
1090mm max
1030mm max
1301mm
2450mm
4553mm
37%
63%
Kerb weight: 1645kg

PARKING

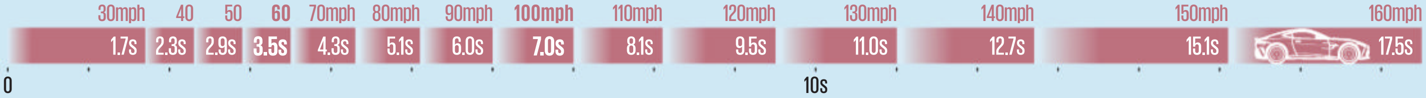

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
1790mm
2020mm (with mirrors)
3800mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 8deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 10.4sec at 128.4mph **Standing km** 19.7sec at 164.2mph **30-70mph** 2.6sec **30-70mph in fourth** 4.7sec **0-62mph** 2.9sec

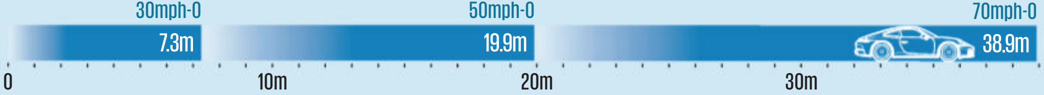


Aston Martin Vantage (2024, 22deg C, dry)
Standing quarter mile 11.4sec at 132.5mph **Standing km** 20.2sec at 168.4mph **30-70mph** 2.6sec **30-70mph in fourth** 4.2sec **0-62mph** 3.6sec

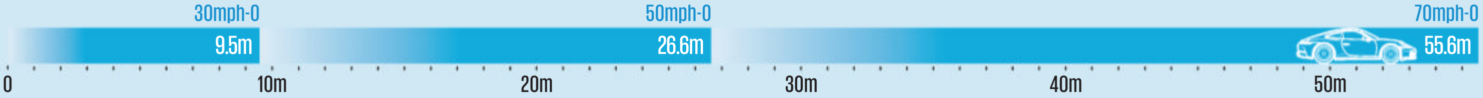


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.15sec



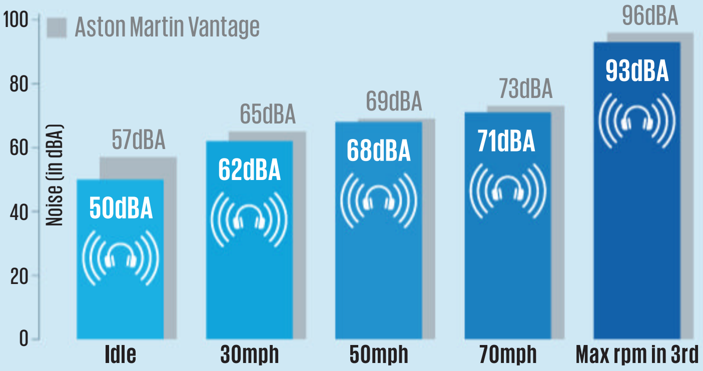
Wet 60-0mph 2.86sec



ACCELERATION IN GEAR

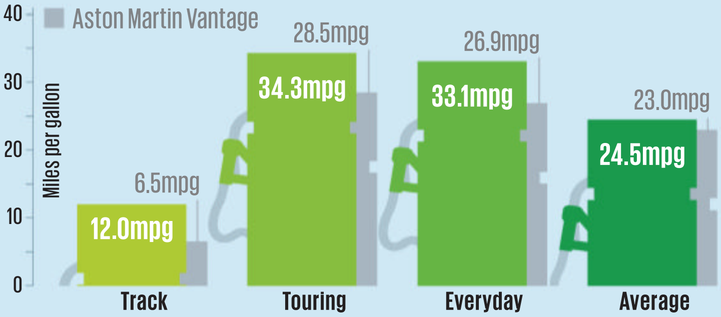
mph	Time (sec) 2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
20-40	1.2	1.7	2.5				
30-50	1.2	1.7	2.3	3.3	4.9		
40-60	1.2	1.7	2.3	3.1	4.5	7.4	
50-70		1.7	2.4	3.3	4.4	7.3	12.7
60-80		1.7	2.6	3.5	4.5	6.3	12.2
70-90		1.9	2.7	3.6	4.8	6.4	10.9
80-100			2.7	3.8	5.0	7.0	10.2
90-110			3.0	3.9	5.3	7.7	11.3
100-120			3.5	4.1	5.8	8.5	
110-130				4.3	6.3	9.8	
120-140				4.6	7.1		
130-150				5.0			

CABIN NOISE



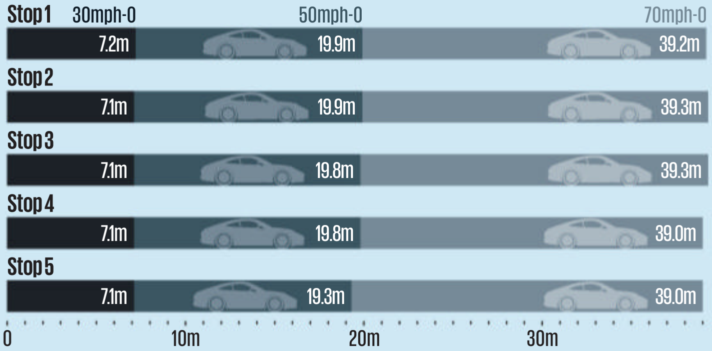
RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 25.7-26.9mpg (combined) **Test range** 340/475/459 miles (average/touring/everyday)



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: -0.2m



THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission. For information on the 911 Carrera GTS, contact Porsche Customer Relations Hub, Porsche Cars Great Britain, Bath Road, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SE (03457 911 911, porsche.com/uk).

PETER LIDDIARD

TESTERS' NOTES

RICHARD LANE
I wasn't prepared for how much of an animal this GTS is, and I mean that in a good way. The new 3.6 is guttural in a manner that has eluded every flavour of the 3.0-litre twin-turbo unit, and the way this car turns in is second only to the double-wishboned GT3. Lighter than claimed too.

MATT SAUNDERS
I'll be honest: I didn't have 'Porsche returns to the single-turbo, 3.6-litre format after three decades' on my bingo card for the age of electrification we're currently inhabiting, but one really should never take anything for granted. It's a fabulous powertrain. Chapeau.

SPEC ADVICE

The optional RS Spyder wheels remain a solid favourite at Autocar HQ and are a no-cost option – they look superb. Elsewhere, our car didn't have PDCC and it wasn't missed; carbon-ceramic discs will bring the weight below 1600kg but push the price towards £150k; and the £1105 roofbox is pretty smart.

More broadly, decide if you want your GTS to be a GT3-lite (bucket seats, fire extinguisher and plenty of Race-Tex) or more of a daily driver (front-axle lift system, Sports seats Plus and 'Club Leather' upholstery).

FACELIFT FIXES

- Continue attempts to ameliorate road roar without incurring any dynamic penalty.
- Get that excellent new motor spinning beyond 8000rpm.

RANKING RIVALS

1 PORSCHE 911 CARRERA GTS

BMW M4 CS

£117,950

★★★★½

Our full road test of BMW's medium-rare M4 (in philosophy, the CS sits between the Competition and the rear-drive CSL) will very shortly hit these pages, but an initial go in one at the Salzburgring last year painted a picture of an expertly honed performance coupé with arguably the most driver-oriented four-wheel drive system yet fitted to a production car. The asking price is almost as brutal as the punchy aero kit but the result is very special indeed. It gets the better of the 911 is some ways, though not in feel or speed.

Engine 6 cyls in line, 2993cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Layout Front, longitudinal, four-wheel drive
Power 542bhp at 6250rpm
Torque 479lb ft at 2750-2950rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic
Kerb weight 1760kg
0-62mph 3.4sec
Top speed 188mph
Economy 27.7mpg
CO_2 232g/km

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE

£165,000

★★★★½

Big-hearted Aston delivers a different flavour of rawness to the 911 and is understandably more touring-ready in terms of comfort and opulence. Note, however, that it's also the considerably wilder ride, should the mood take you. Throttle-adjustability is the Vantage's middle name and its reserves of torque seem to be deliberately, provocatively in excess of the rear tyres' capacity for grip on anything other than a bone-dry road. The rest of the time it's a soothing GT – one with a wonderfully evocative cabin and an epic V8.

Engine V8, 3892cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Layout Front, longitudinal, rear-wheel drive
Power 656bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 590lb ft at 2750-6000rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic
Kerb weight 1670kg
0-62mph 3.7sec
Top speed 202mph
Economy 23.0mpg
CO_2 274g/km

LOTUS EMIRA V6

£89,895

★★★★☆

Even with a Corvette in the mix, the Lotus is the most old-world, 'analogue' car on this list, with its manual gearbox and non-turbocharged V6 (which started life as a Toyota unit). It's a more rounded proposition than you might expect too, taking its lead more from the old Evora than any Elise or Exige of old and benefiting from a cabin that runs the Porsche surprisingly close in terms of perceived quality and is perhaps a little more artful in visual terms. More communicative steering might see it higher in the rankings.

Engine V6, 3456cc, supercharged, petrol
Layout Mid, transverse, rear-wheel drive
Power 400bhp at 6800rpm
Torque 310lb ft at 2700rpm
Gearbox 6-spd manual
Kerb weight 1430kg
0-62mph 4.4sec
Top speed 186mph
Economy 29.1mpg
CO_2 225g/km

CHEVROLET CORVETTE Z06

£179,791

★★★★☆

Firecracker V8 sits amidships in Chevy's 911 GT3 alternative, which is, in fact, more aligned with the character of the 911 GTS in our estimations. It's a big personality but also a fine car – not just brash and exciting but genuinely immersive, wickedly quick and capable of exploring all the dynamic potential unlocked in switching from a front-engined layout. The only drawback is the recently announced cost – in the UK, the Z06 should get plenty of kit but will set you back nearly £180,000. Hardly the bargain it is Stateside.

Engine V8, 5463cc, petrol
Layout Mid, longitudinal, rear-wheel drive
Power 637bhp at 8550rpm
Torque 439lb ft at 6400rpm
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic
Kerb weight 1714kg
0-60mph 3.1sec
Top speed 186mph
Economy 15.0mpg (EPA)
CO_2 na

MERCEDES-AMG GT 63 COUPE

£162,015

★★★½☆

Mercedes has reimagined its flagship model, which now shares its platform with the SL. The results are mixed. On one hand the GT is more versatile than ever, being happy to play the GT role one moment but also being capable of covering ground with the kind of pace and underwheel security that was previously reserved for the likes of the 911 Turbo and the now-retired Nissan GT-R. However, next to the 911 GTS, it lacks an element of poise and precision, and never truly manages to disguise its heft.

Engine V8, 3892cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Layout Front, longitudinal, rear-wheel drive
Power 577bhp at 6500rpm
Torque 590lb ft at 2250-4500rpm
Gearbox 9-spd dual-clutch automatic
Kerb weight 1895kg
0-62mph 3.2sec
Top speed 196mph
Economy 20.0mpg
CO_2 319g/km

VERDICT

Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere

★★★★⯪

The story of this latest Carrera GTS has two distinct elements. One relates to the name itself, and the kind of car it represents. What started as a parts-bin special (albeit an immensely lovable one) in the late-2000s, then for years occupied something of a bit-part role in the broader 911 line-up, has suddenly become the most headstrong, exciting and individualistic derivative with the possible exception of the GT3 RS. Today, the GTS is arguably the Platonic ideal of the modern road-going Porsche 911: thrilling but usable.

The second element is the advent of the T-Hybrid powertrain. One can't help wondering if simply having the 3.6-litre engine in atmospheric form and making do with less power would result in a sweeter driver's car (it would mean a lighter one, certainly). However, if regulations are ushering the 911 onto a hybrid path, this is a sensitive way to do it.

RJ74 HZA
911 Carrera GTS

10:26
AM
4G
Dynamic
Tyres
Drive
Energy
Battery charge state
50 %
Combustion engine
0 kW
Battery temperature
30 °C
E-Boost
1 kW

CLASSIC AND SPORTSCAR
WHY YOU still CAN'T BEAT A MINI COOPER
DAIMLER DART California wreck to British beauty
QUEST FOR THE ULTIMATE SPORTSCAR
FROM 10 GREATS WE PICK A WINNER
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John Surtees tests the top 10 and picks the
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MKII Jaguar & Citroën DS at war
Elans: why owners love them
BUMPER 316-PAGE COLLECTOR'S ANNIVERSARY EDITION
BRITAIN'S FASTEST CARS
Flat-out in ten production performance cars from the 1920s to the 2020s
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LOTUS ELAN PROFILE
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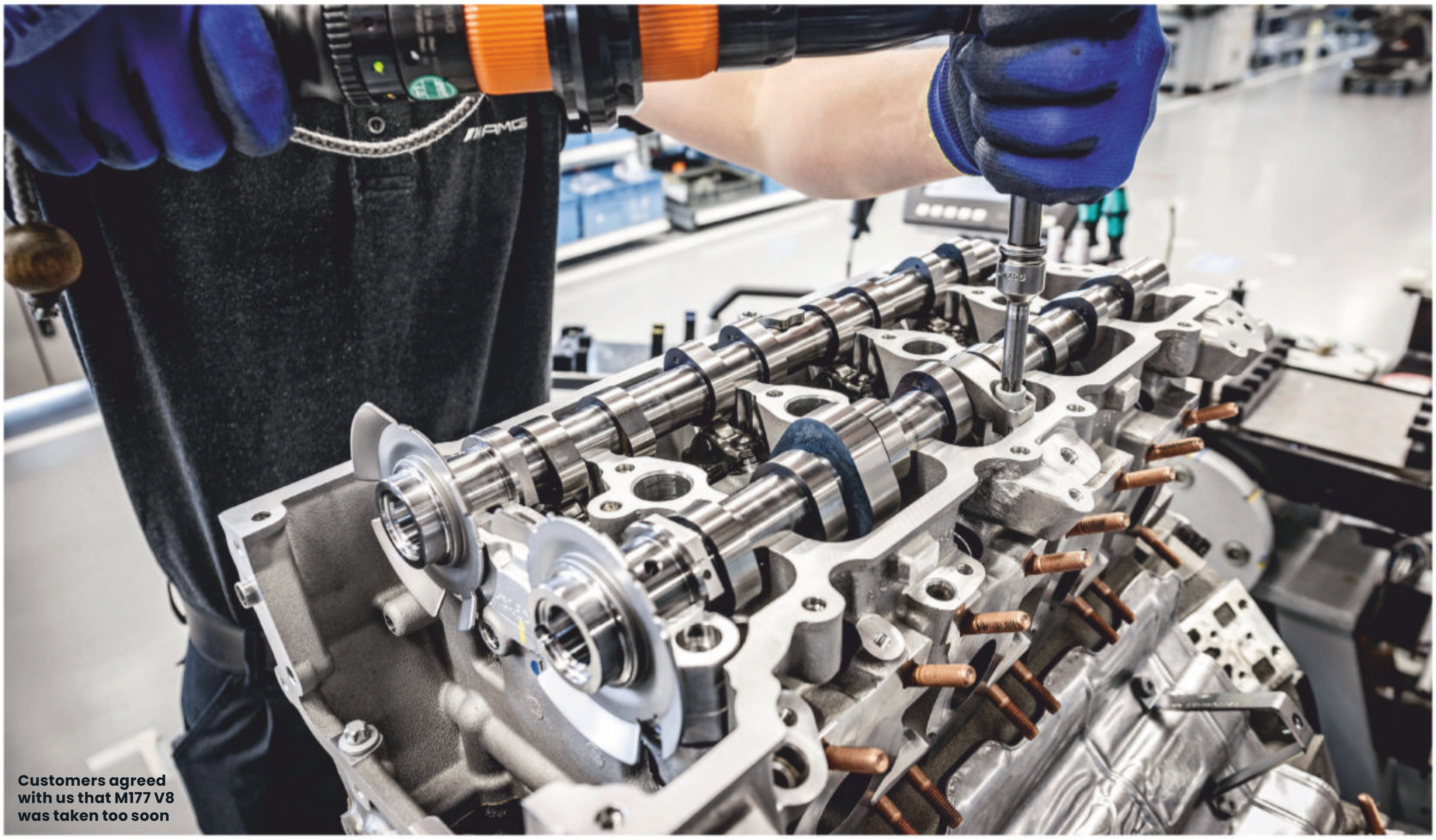
RICHARD LANE

Testing, testing



Customers agreed with us that M177 V8 was taken too soon

Fans of the egg-faced volte-face will be smirking into their coffee mugs this week at the news that Mercedes-AMG's incoming CLE 63 coupé is to get not four, not six but eight cylinders (see p10). What's more, when the current C63 saloon and estate come in for their mid-life refresh next year, they too will become available with AMG's new mild-hybrid V8 set-up.

This was never the plan. Mercedes wanted – and I use that word loosely – the 2.0-litre four-pot M139 to succeed the C63's 4.0-litre V8 M177 full stop and threw in punchy electrical assistance to sweeten the deal. The diddy M139 would be marketed on the might of its world-beating specific output and its Formula 1 technology.

In fairness, from a purely logical standpoint, this wasn't an insane idea. The M139's specific output in the current C63 is 236bhp per litre. It's a snort-inducing stat that in years gone by was attainable only if you left an RB26DETT unattended in a tobacco-perfumed workshop in Chiba Prefecture. It's an awesome feat of engineering in a road car with Apple CarPlay and a big boot that will tolerate both freezing starts in Siberia and being ragged senseless in bitumen-melting heat on a Saudi expressway.

So the M139 is special. And expensive. The block is chill-cast, there are lots of forged bits and it's hand-assembled. If, when this engine surfaced in the A45 hatch in 2019, you had told me there was a 90-second delay when you started the car to allow time for warm water to be pumped around the block and tolerances to sweeten up, DTM-style, I might actually have believed you.

> **"Speed wasn't all that mattered and a stink was kicked up"**

But the M139 just isn't the right donkey for the C63. Not at this moment. Or possibly ever. Sales have been dismal. PR-wise, it has been a disaster. Electrification has also made the car shockingly porky. Perhaps BMW could have got away with such a dramatic downsizing for the mainstay of its M portfolio, because the M3 has never been quite as 'engine first, chassis second' as the C63, and of course there is precedent in the E30. Then again, perhaps not. To me, the i8 will always be a massively underappreciated left-field gem, and you have to imagine BMW would have sold a damn sight more if, instead of a Mini triple, it had squeezed an 8000rpm six into that sci-fi body.

Thus die Kehrtwende – the U-turn. AMG is now choreographing a juicy one. They happen from time to time when a manufacturer pushes ill-advised tech (it always makes sense on paper) onto a product that is, in certain ways, property of the card-carrying owner base – if not in terms of intellectual property then spiritually.

Porsche once tried this by making the 911 GT3 PDK-only. GT division boss Andreas Preuninger said something about everyone at Porsche loving to shift gears manually but loving being fastest 'even more'. True, the PDK is military-grade in its ability to pop off a 9000rpm upshift. But given the driver-centric bent of the GT3 and the fact even the prior manual model could blow your socks off, speed really wasn't everything (as Preuninger well knew). A stink was duly kicked up. Values of the limited, manual-only 911 R touching a million quid – true madness – also focused minds in Stuttgart. So Porsche did the decent thing and reintroduced the manual.

At this point, you're probably expecting me to tell you that barely any of us bought these manual GT3s, yet since its rehabilitation the three-pedal model has sold well. It will be a similar story with any V8-engined C63, and especially the CLE, with its AMG-stuff-of-nightmares aesthetic to match the woofle.

Of course, pigheadedness often works. Four-wheel drive for the M3? Superb. Turbocharging the 911 Carrera? Unexpectedly good. Paddles in mid-engined Ferraris? Great, eventually. V10 in an Audi wagon? Er, yeah, why the hell not.

As for what's next, it depends on what you class as a U-turn. The Emira was meant to have a short run as the final oil-fired Lotus but now a hybrid is mooted. Bentley is another that has pushed back plans to go fully electric and now is investing in V8-hybrid powertrains. Porsche, feeling the heat of turgid Taycan sales, is committing up to €800m to ICE and PHEV development. But none of these is gratifying to witness, just evidence of an amazing industry wrestling with a regulatory minefield littered with global inconsistencies and customers who understandably can't make up their mind. Sticking the boot in isn't cricket.

However, prematurely relieving an iconic model of its life force or stripping one of the world's totemic driver's cars of its third pedal? Risible. We therefore welcome die Kehrtwende.

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Cheap skates

The Dacia Spring is widely regarded as the value champion of practical, usable EVs but now it has a credible £16k rival in the UK: the Leapmotor T03. **ILLYA VERPRAET** pits them against each other

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

Electric cars, and new cars in general, are expensive. You know it, we know it, and even though they prefer to draw your attention to attractive-looking finance deals and the potential savings of electric driving, car makers know it.

Yes, they do appear to be trying to improve things (while protecting their bottom line, of course) but the various innovative 'mobility solutions' have proved to be deeply inadequate for most people and cheap 'cars' like the Citroën Ami are a case of being careful what you wish for. We want cheap cars, but not like that.

Affordable petrol cars are bad for car makers' CO_2 quotas and, in spite of the demand from customers, are increasingly difficult to make a profit on. Of the five sub-£15,000 cars we gathered together for a group test in 2023, only Dacia's Sandero remains below that mark today.

The situation might be changing, though. The relentless march of progress means that the platforms aimed at developing markets may now be perceived as more acceptable over here. Meanwhile, battery costs are (slowly) coming down. So if you package a modest number of cheaper cells in one of those cheaper platforms, you might actually end up with a very decent yet affordable electric car.

That recipe has been used for both the Dacia Spring Electric and the Leapmotor T03. Both are available for well under £20,000, can seat four people, are capable of motorway speeds and exceed 140 miles on the combined cycle. On the face of it, Mini and Honda were asking over £30,000 for the same sort of thing not so long ago.

Sounds good, but there is the danger that we're dealing with the Temu version of the Honda E and Mini Electric here: attractive on paper but horribly compromised in functionality. Encouragingly, both manufacturers are reputable enough to dispel such concerns. Dacia's reputation speaks for itself by now. The Duster, Sandero and Jogger are brilliant examples of all the car you need, nothing you don't. It's not that Dacia reduces a car to its bare essentials but, more significantly, it does the essentials so, so well.

The Spring is slightly different. It's based on the Renault Kwid, which was launched in India in 2015 and gained early infamy for its disastrous crash test results. (Look it up on YouTube: it's eye-widening.) Since then, it has been updated with better crash structures, airbags, a couple of facelifts and latterly a pack of batteries under the floor. The electric version, which is built in China, is sold as a Renault elsewhere but came to mainland Europe a few years ago as the Dacia Spring.

Last year, it had a major facelift to Dacify it further and turn it into a more cohesive product for the European market – including the UK this time. If you compare the Spring we have here with the old one, it might as well be an entirely different car. The Y-shaped light signature and ▸

Their narrowness is an asset on these roads as well as on city streets

◂ cityscape pattern on the lower grille have really turned budget transport into a cool little city car, even if there is still something awkward-looking about its small-wheeled tippy-toe stance. If you peer through the rear wheel arch, you can actually see the torsion beam for the suspension.

We know what a Dacia is, even if it's actually a Chinese-Indian Renault, but what the hell is a Leapmotor? Fast-moving start-up, China, high-tech electric mobility, yadda, yadda. You've heard that sort of thing before, but what makes us all take notice is that Stellantis has a 21% stake in the company and owns 51% of Leapmotor International, a joint venture set up to increase Leapmotor sales outside of China. Not only that, but it has started building left-hand-drive T03s in the Fiat plant in Tychy, Poland. In other words, our Franco-Romanian car is made in China, whereas our Chinese car could have been built in Poland, although right-hand-drive ones continue to come out of China.

So Stellantis gives credibility to Leapmotor in the form of brand recognition and a dealer network, but that's about where the Stellantis involvement ends. The T03 isn't a cut-down Vauxhall Corsa: it's a pure Leapmotor development. There's a battery under the floor, a motor in the front and, like many Chinese cars, a design that is inoffensive but very derivative. If the front has shades of cross-eyed Smart Forfour, from the back it could be absolutely anything.

Instead, it draws you in by being apparently overspecced in almost every way, at least on paper. At the UK launch, Leapmotor's PR team weren't shy about making comparisons with the Dacia Spring and even brought a static Spring to show just how much better equipped the T03 is for the same price. Indeed, in a game of austerity Top Trumps, the Leapmotor wins easily.

It comes in just one spec, and for your £15,995, Leapmotor gives you a 37.3kWh battery, 94bhp and loads of equipment: a fully fledged infotainment system with navigation, adaptive cruise control, blindspot monitoring, a panoramic sunroof and 48kW DC charging.

Meanwhile, at Dacia, the same money will buy you a Spring with the upgraded motor (still only 64bhp), a battery of only 26.8kWh, no fast charging, no centre screen and none of that fancy-pants tech. Our test car is in Extreme trim, which adds an infotainment screen, cruise control and 30kW fast charging but is £1000 more.

In practice, though, these philosophies are emblematic of the different ways that the Chinese and European manufacturers develop their cars. What's there in the Dacia works well, whereas you're in for a bit more of a fight with the Leapmotor's apparent luxury features.

The interior is a case in point. Inside, the T03 is clearly intended to feel like a 'proper' car, with its restrained styling and standard infotainment screen. It's unmistakably quite a small space, though, so it can't help but feel slightly incongruous. There's none of the sense of fun that small cars, including the Spring, are traditionally quite good at.

Although the Leapmotor's touchscreen works passably well, it's not great. It has no Apple

"Both have the pace to keep up with traffic on A- and B-roads"

At 38.2kWh, a Range Rover P550e plug-in hybrid has a bigger battery than these two pure EVs, from which it extracts about half the range: 75 miles. Energy (in)efficiency in action.

Spring is more sparsely equipped but it's easier to use

T03 comes with lots of kit, including that panoramic roof

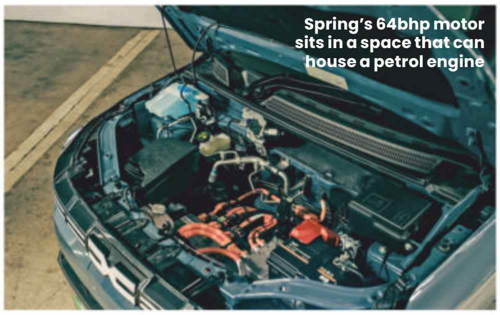
Nearly new alternatives

The step down in capability from a Renault 5 to a Spring is more of a tumble than the step down from a Megane to a 5. The same is true in the Stellantis family: the step down from an electric Astra to a Corsa is far smaller than from a Corsa to a Leapmotor T03. That automatically leads you to wonder: well, what about a Corsa?

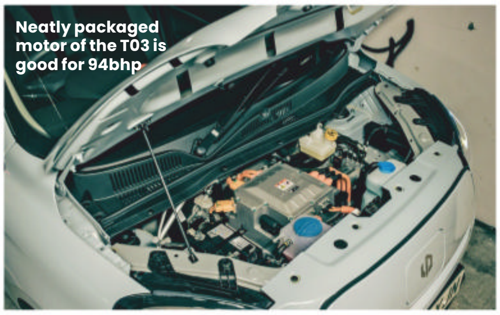
If you really want a newish electric car on a budget, there are lots of facelifted Vauxhall Corsa Electrics for sale online with delivery mileage for the same money as the Spring or the T03. The Renault Zoe has been out of production for almost a year, so you'll have to accept a higher mileage, but very fresh ones can be had for even less than the Corsa. Or how about an MG 4? Delivery-mileage standard-range cars can be bought for well under £20,000.

Comparing new and used is fraught when you have to take into account older cars and expired warranties, but this is not the case here and becomes more of an existential question.

Delivery-mileage Corsa Electric or new Spring/T03?



Spring's 64bhp motor sits in a space that can house a petrol engine



Neatly packaged motor of the T03 is good for 94bhp

CarPlay or Android Auto, so you're reliant on the radio and Bluetooth for media and the built-in system for navigation, which is quite fiddly to programme. The climate controls are also on the screen, and although they're permanently displayed in a bar at the bottom, the 'buttons' are quite small. Neither of these cars has automatic climate control, so you end up fiddling with the heater and fan speed a lot.

That process is so much easier with the Dacia's physical knobs and switches. Our test car has the optional touchscreen with phone mirroring, and while the more basic version doesn't have a centre screen at all, it has an integrated holder for your phone, which does media and navigation pretty well anyway.

Neither of the two has heated seats. That's frustrating because it can't be very expensive to fit heating elements to the seats. Given these cars are used primarily for short hops, you end up losing quite a lot of range to the heater when you just want your back to be kept warm.

With all that said, the T03 is far more accommodating than the Spring. Its doors feel much less tinny, the seats have more padding and the driving position is far superior to the Dacia's. The Spring makes you feel more like a circus bear in a comedy car. The pedals are too close for comfort and you sit quite high in relation to the controls and the top of the windscreen.

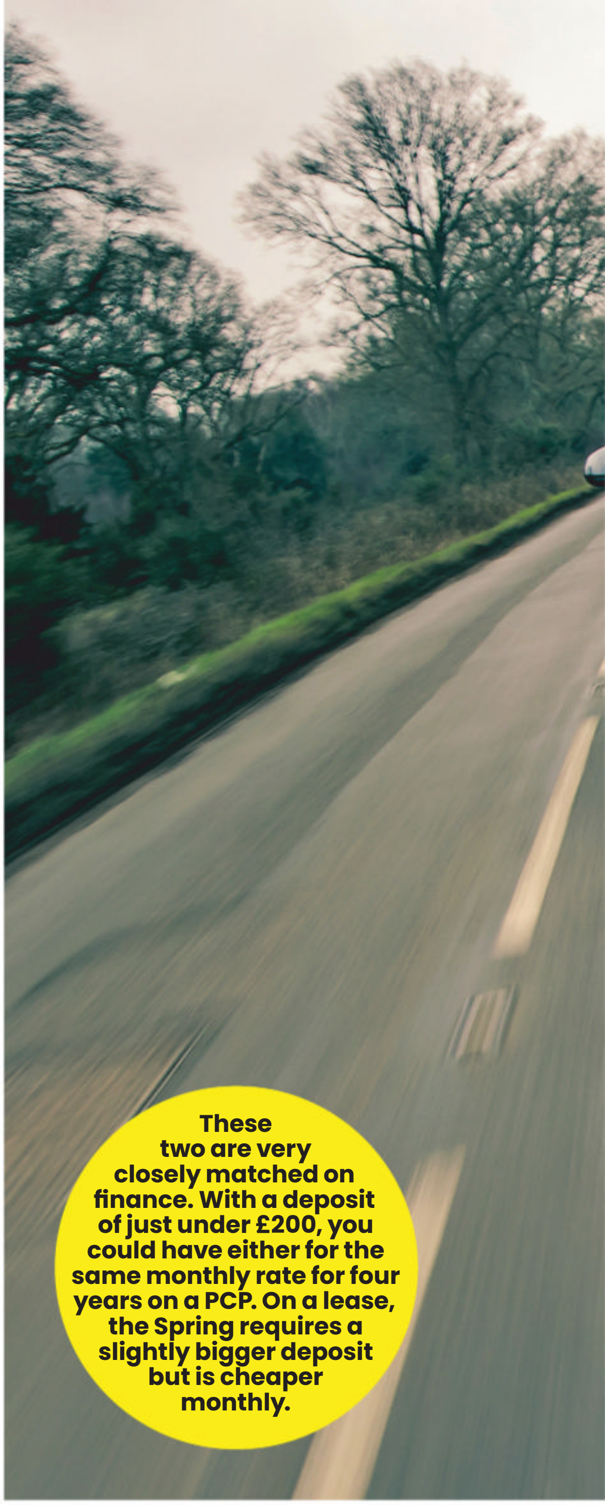
Both are small cars, so rear carrying space is inevitably limited. Surprisingly enough, at 6ft 2in I can just about sit behind my own driving position in both, albeit slightly easier in the Leapmotor. That's despite it being a little shorter in length than the Dacia. The T03 partly has its architecture to thank for that, because it doesn't need to be able to house a petrol engine in the front for other variants, unlike the Spring. At the same time, it also sacrifices some boot space. Its 210-litre boot is notably tighter than the Dacia's (308 litres) and has a much narrower opening.

The Spring makes more of its limited means on the road too. It's easy to become jaded when it comes to power outputs in electric cars, but when you're talking double figures, every pony counts. And in this case, the Leapmotor has almost 1.5 times as many of them as the Dacia. If this were true for the Mercedes-AMG C63 and the BMW M3, the Mercedes would have 768bhp.

According to the official figures, however, the Spring is only a second slower to 62mph, and subjectively you would struggle to tell the difference. Neither car is quick, but in both cases they have enough performance to keep up with ▸

Leapmotor and Dacia feel brisk enough in town

To most eyes, the Dacia exudes more visual character


These two are very closely matched on finance. With a deposit of just under £200, you could have either for the same monthly rate for four years on a PCP. On a lease, the Spring requires a slightly bigger deposit but is cheaper monthly.

◂ traffic on A- and B-roads. Sure, you're to the boards quite a lot, but while that's tiring in a Kia Picanto screaming its little head off, it makes very little difference in an EV whether you use half or all the power.

Where you do feel the lack of go – in both cars – is on the motorway. Make no mistake: these are not quadricycles; they'll cruise at 70mph if they have to and that makes them all the more versatile. But you can sense they're not entirely happy doing it. Driving at 60-70mph requires a bit of planning, crosswinds affect them in a way that we're no longer used to and you feel vulnerable between HGVs or when overtaking the SUVs trundling in the middle lane.

You might expect the Leapmotor to have another trump card here in the form of its adaptive cruise control. But it's so poorly tuned that you might as well not have it. The way it seems to want to be either accelerating or braking, and struggles to maintain a speed, is just not comfortable. Although you can set it to standard cruise control, you have to be stopped and in Park to do so, which is not very practical on a motorway.

If you plan to do anything more than occasional motorway driving, neither of these cars is going to provide you with much joy, also because their range and charging speeds feel like a throwback to EVs from seven years ago. Still, both will do more than 100 miles on a charge, in winter, which is a good deal more than most people cover on a daily basis.

Again, the Dacia closes the on-paper gap. It may have a 10kWh-smaller battery, but it's also considerably more efficient. On the same cold day, we achieved 4.2mpkWh from the Spring and just 3.4mpkWh from the T03. The Leapmotor has the longer range, but not by much.

City streets are where these two feel most at home. At only about 1.6m wide and with a turning circle of less than 10m (the Dacia has a manual handbrake if you need it to be tighter still, though maybe not in town), you can thread them through narrow gaps without a care in the world. The Dacia is perhaps marginally easier to place because you can see the edges of the bonnet, but if this is how you'll use them, there's very little in it.

Bigger differences, of quality and character, surface on a country road. Some might see these as city cars, which they are, I suppose. Equally, they would be eminently useful for nipping into town if you live in a rural village with patchy public transport and no cycling infrastructure. You rarely appreciate a narrow car as much as when you're dodging an oncoming truck on a narrow country lane.

Any sortie in the Leapmotor necessarily starts by turning off about seven different 'safety' systems, to save you being driven to distraction by the lane keeping assistance tugging at the steering or the driver monitoring berating you for yawning. It's impossible to turn them off while driving, too. I find it hard to imagine an engineer or exec driving this car and deciding this is a pleasant enough way to travel. In the Dacia, everything works better in the first place and turning it off is done with a single button.

The Leapmotor unequivocally feels like the more mature car on the open road, though. It's more planted, more stable, and you can be confident that it will grip, whereas the Dacia feels flighty because of its loose body control, plastic Linglong EcoMaster tyres and rudimentary damping. The Spring's rear axle seems to have next to no rebound damping and just slams down into the road after sharp ridges and sleeping policemen. Both cars possess very light, disconnected steering, though the Dacia has a slightly keener front end, which actually makes it more fun if you're prepared for the abundance of body roll and lack of grip.

A quick look online shows that acceptably grippy tyres for the Dacia wouldn't cost very much. Those might swing the balance the other way, but if you had to give one of these cars to an unenthusiastic driver, you would pick the T03 because it has just that fraction more of a safety margin. It used to be a French national sport to coax a clapped-out Citroën 2CV or Renault 4 up

Leapmotor has the slight advantage for rear leg room

You get a scant 210 litres of boot space in the T03

Spring will fit two 6ft 2in people line astern – just about

Dacia's 308-litre boot offers a little more practicality

BU74 XJN
SPRING

> *“These two feel like the small cars of yesteryear”*

	DACIA SPRING 65 EXTREME	LEAPMOTOR T03
Rating	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Price	£16,995	£15,995
Engine	Permanent magnet synchronous motor	Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power	64bhp	94bhp
Torque	83lb ft	117lb ft
Gearbox	1-spd reduction gear, FWD	1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight	984kg	1175kg
0-62mph	13.7sec	12.7sec
Top speed	78mph	81mph
Battery	26.8kWh (NMC)	37.3kWh (LFP)
Range	140 miles	165 miles
Economy	4.6mpkWh	3.8mpkWh
Max charging rate	7.4kW (AC), 30kW (DC)	6.6kW (AC), 48kW (DC)

a mountain pass at lightning speed, but let’s be honest: not everyone is into that.

To a greater or lesser extent, that is what these two cars feel like: the small cars of yesteryear. They’re quite tinny and not especially luxurious or capable, but they provide basic transport and there is something entertaining about driving them quickly down a country road and catching up all the dawdlers in their much faster cars. And while neither car will top any group tests for safety, you can bet your kneecaps that they’ll protect you better in a crash than a Citroën AX.

Appointing a winner is tricky, because the Spring has gradually whittled away the T03’s on-paper advantage. The Dacia unapologetically feels like a small, cheap car. It does it well and with a sense of fun. The Leapmotor tries to be a more serious, big car and succeeds to a point but it also feels more like an appliance and frustrates with some of the underdeveloped ‘luxury’ features. There’s a place for both, but in the absence of outright competence, a small car is better with a sense of humour and the Dacia Spring is the more likeable product.

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1ST **Cheery and fun. There’s not much to it, but what little there is works well, except for the tyres.**

2ND **More of everything, even if not everything is quite up to snuff. The more competent car, but at the cost of charm.**

“I’m not surprised that EVs haven’t taken off, because most of them suck”

Peter Rawlinson’s uniquely dissenting views helped turn Lucid into a major force. As he steps back from the front line, he tells MARK TISSHAW how

New Gravity should boost Lucid sales, as "an SUV is the vehicle America wants"

Oh to be an electric car maker. "If you want to be loved and have rocks thrown at you simultaneously, you've got it. There's virtually nobody without an opinion. We're not lacking love or hate. Anyone would think what I'm trying to do is genocidal." In fact, all that Lucid Motors' Peter Rawlinson has been trying to do is make the most efficient cars in the world, which if executed correctly could make them the best.

While Lucid makes electric cars and is therefore called an electric car maker alongside any number of wannabe Tesla rivals, spend some time with Rawlinson – formerly of Tesla himself – and you realise that Lucid is very different to any other company out there.

We spoke to him when he was in his long-held position as CEO, but last week it was announced he had resigned to take a new strategic advisory technical role on the board. Regardless of how the company might change day to day under a new CEO, though, Lucid isn't about to change course on its technology or how it makes cars.

While its peers are mainly using the switch to EVs as a way to ultimately reduce emissions, Lucid sees EVs as the opportunity for a better car, period. Rawlinson highlights just how misguided so much EV development has been and reframes just how EVs should be viewed, starting with the most important part of all: efficiency. "You can achieve range effectively in two ways," he says. "One is battery size and one is efficiency."

Rawlinson can't fathom why efficiency is so fundamentally misunderstood and underestimated in the EV lexicon. "Not only by making a car more efficient is it using less of the world's energy, it's also using less battery resources and minerals," he says.

As the battery is the biggest cost item of an EV, this will lead to lower EV prices in the future, too.

"It's only really Lucid that's taking this pioneering approach," claims Rawlinson. "The Lucid Air Pure [saloon] is literally the world's most energy-efficient car. It uses less fuel to go from A to B, whatever your fuel is, than any mass-production car ever in the 130-year history of the car. No one else is even close to this in terms of how advanced their technology is."

The technology that Rawlinson refers to in getting this remarkable efficiency – which has been independently validated by US legislators – is a proprietary design that contains the electric motor and inverter in the same downsized unit.

Yet the dominant language concerning EVs is range, and the enabling factor in the market generally to that end has been battery size. This irks Rawlinson, as he believes that ignoring efficiency is "missing the point" and "insane".

> **"Everything everyone has learned about cars is wrong"**

"Because we're so efficient, we've got a much bigger range," he says. "We can do 500 miles of range without having a crazy-large battery pack. And because that battery pack isn't crazy-large, the car is agile and handles well and rides well and is comfortable and roomy for your feet.

"What efficiency fundamentally gives you is a massively better car. The problem we've got is that if you look at the petrol equivalent, the only thing that efficiency gives you is less cost of buying petrol. It doesn't really make a better car, it just means you pay less for petrol.

"That's the difference between an electric car and a petrol car: you get a car that does 20mpg versus 40mpg, but the 40mpg car is worse, because it's not got the performance.

"Most car enthusiasts with petrol cars will want an inefficient car because it's higher performance. The reason the [range-topping Air] Sapphire can blow everyone out the water is because of its efficiency. It doesn't lose power and it turns all those electrons to burn rubber. Efficiency gives it performance.

"And that's the difference with a petrol car, where efficiency means low performance. With electric cars, because it's the other way around, the more efficient they are, you can have higher performance, because you're not losing power to heat in turning the power into burning rubber. So everything everyone has learned about cars is wrong."

To put it another way, Rawlinson says that if he told you "I've just got a car to do 100mpg, you'd say it was a Bluemotion [Volkswagen] Golf. But no, I've done it in a [Mercedes-Benz] S-Class. You'd say that was bullshit, but that's literally what we have here [with the Air]. We have an S-Class long wheelbase in terms of interior room which is doing 146mpg."

(That figure is actually MPGe, an official US rating that enables consumers to directly compare EV efficiency with ICE car efficiency.)

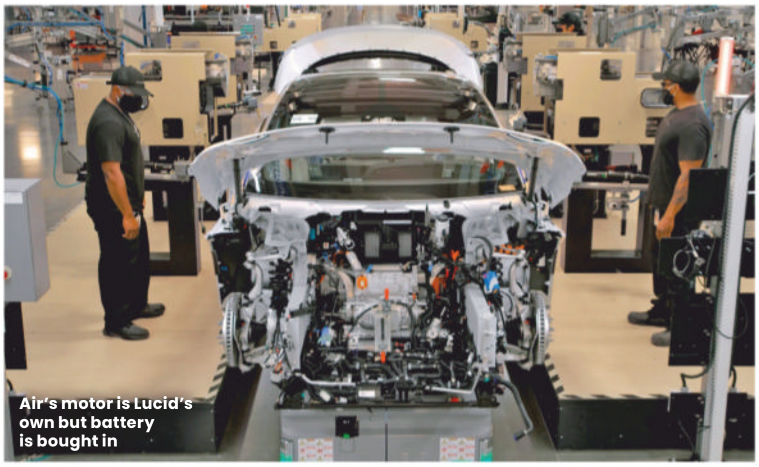
"Nobody is writing about it, because it's so far out and feels unbelievable," continues Rawlinson. "People said I was lying three years ago when I said we would have 500 miles of range. When it became true, they said I'd stuffed the car full of batteries.

"The problem is, it's so much better than the competition that people don't grasp it. These aren't numbers I'm claiming, these are government numbers, independently validated and underwritten."

On an environmental level, says Rawlinson, "if you've got twice the efficiency, you're going to have half the battery. That means less mines for lithium, less cobalt mining, less nickel."

While Lucid produces its own motors, it sources batteries from partner firms including LG Chem, Panasonic and Samsung. It chooses to invest and develop in motor technology because it believes this is where true gains can be made in efficiency, and it has ongoing research projects to boost that efficiency even further.

Rawlinson explains: "Everyone talks about battery efficiency, but battery efficiency almost ▸

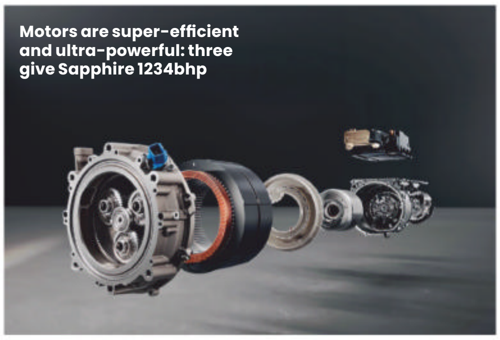


Air's motor is Lucid's own but battery is bought in

Air production started at new-build US factory in Arizona in 2021

SHUTTERSTOCK

Lucid has started at the upper end, with prices from $70k to $250k


Motors are super-efficient and ultra-powerful: three give Sapphire 1234bhp

◂ doesn't exist. It's a misnomer. It's crazy. It's a bit like saying 'petrol efficiency'. 'Is it Shell's [petrol that's more efficient] or Aramco's?' That would be ridiculous, but that's what we're talking about. With batteries, it would be good for everyone to stop using the wrong words to describe things."

Solid-state technology has long been widely viewed as the future of EVs for allowing smaller, more power-dense, faster-charging batteries, but Rawlinson is "bearish" on his view that this won't be the case, as "nobody can solve the productionisation" of solid-state batteries yet. They haven't been made in anything more than laboratory quantities.

Rawlinson has made an open offer to provide any supplier of solid-state battery cells with a Lucid battery casing that they can use to demonstrate their technology. The results would be shared but Lucid wouldn't look inside the pack, to protect the supplier's intellectual property.

"But in eight years, nobody has taken me up on that offer," he says. "You can't build them [at scale]. It would take three years to fill that pack.

"I'm not saying it won't happen. It might happen. If it does happen, hallelujah. Combine that with our efficiency and you're then suddenly able to halve the battery weight. But our efficiency still counts. Solid-state [technology] promises to deliver but never ever does, because no one can put it into mass production."

Rawlinson is more optimistic about the lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) battery chemistry that's emerging in lower-cost EVs as an alternative to nickel manganese cobalt.

"They were heavy and didn't store much energy, so they were low-cost but low-range," says Rawlinson, but improvements to energy density and their ability to withstand fast charging have made him "much more bullish" about the adoption of LFP batteries.

More generally, Rawlinson isn't surprised that EV sales are stalling "because so many of them suck. I'm sorry, this is the truth," he says, elaborating that many have "very poor range" and are made from "low-technology, off-the-shelf commodity parts".

Then there's the problem of "the accessibility, the usability and the reliability of the [public] charging infrastructure" if you don't have access to the Air's whopping range – something still denied to Rawlinson's fellow Brits (see separate story, right).

"If you've got an incredible charging infrastructure, you don't need so much range; if you haven't, you need range," he says. "Right now, we haven't got reliable infrastructure and we haven't got sufficient cars with much range. And so it's a horrible experience."

This links into what Rawlinson believes is "a myopia about fast charging". He is an advocate for confronting what he sees as the bigger issue of on-street charging, which allows EVs to be charged overnight by people who don't have a driveway or garage at home.

"I think this is very important," says Rawlinson, "because if you look at the amount of electricity it takes to mobilise cars, I don't think that's an issue. The average person may travel about 20-30 miles a day, because not everybody is doing long commutes.

"Lucid can do five miles per kilowatt hour now [on the US test, which is more stringent than the WLTP regime used in Europe and the UK]. To get that 20 miles [of range], it requires only 4kWh in a 24-hour cycle.

"Don't tell me there isn't enough electricity on the grid. That isn't the issue. I think people shouldn't have to be thinking in terms of going to fast-charge. They should be charging overnight when the electricity is cheaper, when the grid is down, when the electricity is available. It's better for the power stations, because they're not coking up and coking down in a 24-hour cycle. I'm a big advocate of working on the infrastructure of overnight, slower, AC charging at home or on the street."

This brings us to the issue of EVs' affordability. "I'm not surprised [that they're expensive]," says Rawlinson. "It's because car makers are going down the range route as a function of battery size. Lucid never did this. Range is a function of our efficiency, through technology. If you go down the route of range as a function of battery size, the only way you will achieve range is putting more batteries in, and that will cost so much more.

"How can you make that vehicle affordably? You can't, because you've got to stuff all those expensive batteries in. And this is the problem. This is the whole wrong mindset. Our technology enables cars to have the range without the cost of those batteries. And this is going to play out over the next few years. People aren't seeing it today, because we've got high-end cars which compete with Mercedes and Porsche. It will play out when we have more affordable cars."

GAGE SKIDMORE

LUCID'S AMBITIOUS EXPANSION PLANS

Peter Rawlinson has done what few other EV start-ups have managed to do: actually get cars into production at scale. Tesla has proven very much the exception to the rule.

Lucid's initial model, the Air saloon, has just now been joined by the Gravity SUV. They are built on different underpinnings but share a 'flexible' production line at Lucid's plant in Casa Grande, Arizona.

For 2025, Rawlinson is "hopeful we will see very significant growth" from the 10,241 cars that it delivered in 2024, not least because the Gravity "is the vehicle America wants: an SUV".

Lucid currently sells cars in North America, the Middle East and select European nations but not the UK, because converting the Air to right-hand drive would have diverted engineering resources away from other projects. Brit Rawlinson would like to offer right-hand drive and says "there's an opportunity to get the Gravity in right-hand drive earlier than the Air", because the former is symmetrical in its design, whereas the latter is asymmetrical.

Now the Gravity has been launched, the biggest thing on the horizon for Lucid is a new mid-size architecture for more affordable EVs, to be built in a factory under construction near Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

While Lucid's market position today is alongside Mercedes and Porsche, "why we were created, and what our mission is, is to make more affordable cars". To that end, the mid-size models will be launched from 2027 priced alongside the likes of the Tesla Model 3 from around $40,000 (£32,000).

In five years from now, Rawlinson says Lucid will have three architectures, with the two underpinning the Air and Gravity sharing a common 'Zeus' motor and built in Arizona. This motor technology will also be used by Aston Martin. The Saudi-built mid-size cars, meanwhile, will use a downsized 'Atlas' drivetrain.

"I want us to be selling a million cars a year by the early 2030s," says Rawlinson. "That's not guidance, it's a vision."

"People said I was lying when I said we would have 500 miles of range... It's so much better than the competition that people don't grasp it"

rag & bone
NEW YORK
RETAIL SPACE
RIPCO
RUNYON
Dave's
QUALITY
VEAL
425

Some like it hot

A Saab 9-3 is serving **COLIN GOODWIN** well seven years after he bought it for £2300 but one thing needs fixing: a heated seat. How hard can it be?

MAX EDLESTON, LUC LACEY

The very simple fix would be to buy my wife some thicker knickers. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to wash with her so I am going to have to fix the passenger-side heated seat in our Saab 9-3 by either buying a replacement heating element or by finding a second-hand seat on eBay and replacing the whole shebang.

You've met our Saab before, in 2018 just a couple of months after we bought it. We paid only £2300 for it and since then it has covered almost 50,000 miles and not let us down once. Most owners of old cars tend to fib a bit about reliability and I am no exception: the electric fuel pump packed up but at least it did so outside the house.

I became rather fond of the car as soon as we got it thanks to its smooth and economical light-pressure turbo engine, nicely bedded-in gearbox and hydraulic steering that is better than most modern cars' EPAS systems. Last summer, my relationship with this Swede turned from strong affection to something rather more serious.

The turning point came with a visit to our local hand car wash. Noticing that the Saab's black soft top was looking like an experiment from the Royal Botanical Gardens, he offered to clean it for £15 if I could leave the car with him. God knows what chemical was used but an hour later the top was like new, with all traces of green moss etc gone. Never have I spent such a small sum that reaped such epic reward.

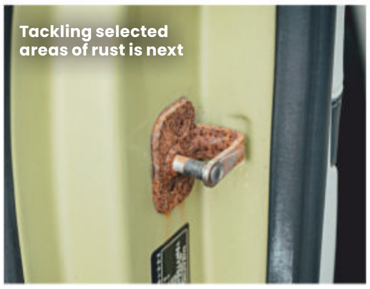
But back to the heated seat issue. No second-hand seats in the correct colour were available on eBay but this was no bad thing because it would have been miserable if I'd bought a seat, fitted it and then discovered that its seat heater was broken too. There's a heated pad in the seat base and another in the backrest and, according to web-based Saab nerds, they're wired in series, so if one goes, the other stops working too. Which one was broken? Good question. I decided to be safe and buy both.

However, while the backrest element is still available, the base one is not. This, I suspect, is down to demand because the seat-base one is more likely to get damaged. The only option was to take a punt on a replacement for another model of Saab and hope that it fitted. I

> “Bloody complex, modern car seats. Wires all over the place”

Goodwin thoroughly enjoys driving his 9-3

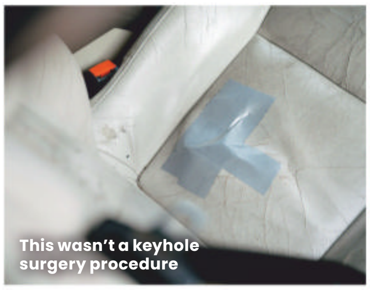
Turbo engine has an ‘honest’ look about it



Tackling selected areas of rust is next

Moss-kissed hood was revitalised for just £15

Gearlever gaiter has been recently replaced



This wasn’t a keyhole surgery procedure

Goodwin first told us about his Saab shortly after he bought it

SWEDE DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS

winged it on a 9-5 part and crossed my fingers.

The modern equivalent of the Haynes manual is YouTube. The only trouble is that whereas the famed manuals were produced by people who actually knew what they were doing, this isn’t always the case on YouTube. For another recent titivation job – replacing the gearlever gaiter, which was torn and tatty – I consulted the experts on tubeworld. One helpful poster demonstrated in his video how to remove the gearknob, which he achieved using an angle grinder. The job was successful but he almost destroyed the car’s interior. In the end I found my own method.

There is a half-decent video on how to remove the seat from the car and then remove the upholstery but the bloke in the video didn’t shut his young child in another room while making the film and the squawking youngster drove me mad, so again I did my own thing.

It turns out the heating element from a 9-5 is not similar to one from a 9-3 convertible, but with careful surgery with scissors, I got it to fit. Bloody complicated (and heavy), modern car seats. Wires all over the place for seatbelt pre-tensioner, airbag, bum sensor (for the seatbelt warning). Thankfully, our car doesn’t have power seat adjustment or that would be more cable and kilograms.

With the seat reassembled and back in the car, I crossed all digits that the problem was the heating pad and not some wiring fault deep within the car’s innards. ‘Had he checked the fuses?’ you’re asking. Yes, I had.

Success! My wife’s derrière is now kept warm on cold mornings.

Now on a run, I replaced the cap on the screenwash bottle with a new one from China that cost £4. My next task is to tackle some rust on the body around the top of the doors and B-pillars. I got a quote to have this done, and although £1800 is a fair price, it would be crazy to spend that much on a car worth only a bit more than that bill. Instead, I’ve bought some touch-up paint and will use some Jenolite to pacify the rust and hopefully be able to make an acceptable local repair.

I know what will happen. I’ll make the body look a lot better and then I’ll start thinking that the alloys are letting the side down and have them refurbished. Never mind, it’s a lot cheaper than leasing a new car or buying one outright. And the Saab doesn’t beep or bong at me. In fact, it is now virtually speechless because I managed to do something terminal to the sensor that sets bells off if the passenger hasn’t done his or her seatbelt up. **A**

TIDY 9-3s FOR UNDER £3000

2008, 130,000 MILES

This is a facelifted 9-3 convertible, for sale at the same specialist where I bought mine. It’s exactly the same spec and, at £2995, shows that prices haven’t increased and that these cars are still great value for money.

2004, 78,000 MILES

It’s the same colour as mine, but it has an auto gearbox. The paint looks good, as do the wheels. It’s ULEZ-compliant too, which is a must if you live in Greater London. Price: £2480.

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"A sense of drama descends when the sun goes down"

FIRST REPORT

CUPRA TAVASCAN

Can a big family EV capture this brand's young, sporty ethos? Let's see

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To find out if the Cupra Tavascan really is a sporty SUV - and if the segment needs it

A friend recently got in touch because his wife was looking for a new car. She is currently running a Volkswagen ID 4, the Ronseal of electric cars – by which I mean an EV that works well as an EV but without being showy. She loves the thing, my friend told me, but it was time for an upgrade and she wanted something a bit different this time round. What else is out there, he asked.

That's quite a question, because the list of potential candidates for anyone seeking an electric SUV is long and growing. Three years ago, the clear class leader was the Tesla Model Y, with its then unmatched range, access to an exclusive and extensive charging network and, all things considered, a rather affordable price.

Today, the competition is much closer, including the ID 4 and fellow VW Group models such as the Skoda Enyaq and Audi Q4 E-tron. Then there are the likes of the Hyundai Ioniq 5, Kia EV6, Renault Scenic, Peugeot e-3008 and more.

But for someone who loved so many things about her ID 4 but was a bit bored of how it looked, one car stood out in my mind: the Cupra Tavascan. "I've just taken 'ownership' of one," I told my friend. "Have you heard of it?"

He hadn't, which presumably means he hadn't seen the Tavascan adverts with the upside-down SUV and lots of fashionable young people. Or he'd seen it and it hadn't registered. So he didn't know that this is Cupra's largest model to date, an electric SUV positioned as the sporty alternative to the Volkswagen ID 5 (which my friend had heard of) – like the Born to the ID 3 – with a sprinkling of Spanish flair. And this is the main reason we're running one: to find out if the Tavascan is indeed a sporty SUV, and if so, could this be a sensible choice for the keener driver in need of a roomy, electric family car?

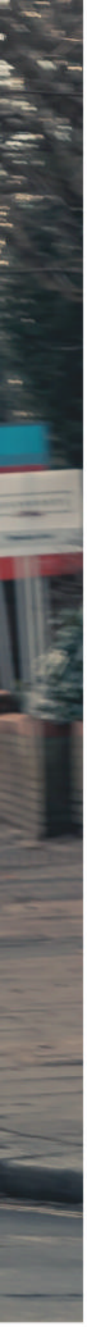
We've got the perfect spec to

Cupra badge has never been applied to a car this big before

Copper highlights and swooping shapes bring a contemporary ambience

SECOND OPINION

After the Cupra Born won our collective hearts, the Tavascan left me a bit cold. It's unreasonable to expect a bigger Born, but in single-motor V1 spec, it felt like a fairly average car for a lot of money. In the posher VZ1 trim of Will's car, I'm sure it will be quite a pleasant daily companion, though. **IV**



Its sporty looks are backed by 335bhp sent to all four wheels

Rimell is a fan of the cabin, including the 'spine' below the 15in touchscreen

answer that question, with our VZ1 model deploying 335bhp to all four wheels. There's even a big copper button inside that activates Cupra mode, priming the car for 5.5sec 0-62mph pace. Which sounds great, until you realise you're in a 2.3-tonne EV and your efficiency has dropped to 1.5mpkWh. So it will be interesting to see how often I use it.

At its heart, though, this is a funky family hauler. It is practical (tons of storage, lots of rear leg room, 540-litre boot) and comfortable, all while being clad in an interesting-looking bodyshell.

That last part draws me to the Tavascan and is, I think, one reason why I've already seen quite a few on the road, even though it was only launched at the end of last year. It has scoops, vents and curves everywhere. Some might see that as fussy, but I like fussy. I'm also a big fan of our car's Tavascan Blue paintwork (a £995 option), copper accents and 21in alloy wheels.

Inside, it's a similar story. Whereas the ID 4 and ID 5 have rather muted interiors, Cupra has given the Tavascan cabin a funky spine. I love it and I find myself holding onto it when cruising. What's more, it's finished in a pleasingly tactile, textured coating that, most importantly, doesn't feel cheap. The rest of the dashboard is made up of shapes and waves in a copper colour that I can only really define as contemporary. Really, they belong in an automotive art exhibition of some kind.

What's more, a sense of drama descends when the sun goes down thanks to extensive cabin lighting, which is fully customisable. In a word, the cabin feels special and makes you feel special – a rarity in today's world of function over form (Tesla, Audi et al). You can almost sense the fun the designers had.

The cabin's other standout feature is the huge – and I mean huge – touchscreen. It's 15in, clear, colourful and reasonably slick to operate. The in-built mapping is also pretty good but, as always, wireless phone mirroring (in my case, Android Auto) is better still.

There are a few niggles so far, though. As with other MEB-based models, all of the car's controls are operated via the touchscreen. While there are permanent quick settings for temperature, window clearing and heated seats (the last two are optional extras), activating the heated steering wheel, for example, requires another menu to be accessed. Disabling any of the vehicle settings, such as the often inaccurate speed limit assist, necessitates four touches of the screen, which is three too many.

A trio of quick-access favourites can be pinned to the top of the screen, which makes life easier. More can be added via a drop-down, but so far I've found this to be quite temperamental. The speed sign monitoring option disappears on every restart, for example.

Elsewhere, the steering wheel's haptic controls are proving to be a bit annoying. I constantly knock them by accident and they're not the most responsive when purposely called on. And don't get me started on the window switches, which require the extra step of touching a toggle if you wish to lower the rear glass.

Starting my tenure in winter has also allowed me to see the Tavascan, in terms of efficiency, at its worst. By that, I mean how its 77kWh battery copes with the cold and how many miles we can eke out of it, given that an EV's efficiency typically takes a hit once the temperature dips below 10deg C.

As expected, it is currently not amazing, but neither is it bad. Having driven mostly motorway miles so far, I am averaging around 2.7mpkWh in the default Comfort driving mode. That equates to 207 miles of range from a car that is claimed to offer 320 miles, even with the optional heat pump installed. (This should never be an optional extra in an EV.) Let's see what the spring weather brings.

For now, I've opted for climate control-limiting Range mode (one of five drive settings), which has boosted efficiency to 3.3mpkWh. Heated seats and steering wheel (both options) make up for the lack of warm air.

Something else I'm slowly getting used to is the braking. The gap between 50% and 100% feels like a hair's width, which makes judging distances difficult. Such is the problem that a man on Rollerblades stopped me once to tell me about it. That's a story for a later date.

I'm excited about my time ahead with the Tavascan, especially the chance to do proper long stints in it. I've got lots planned and many miles to cover. Stay tuned.

WILL RIMELL

TEST DATA

CUPRA TAVASCAN 77KWH AFV 340 VZ1

Price new £55,935 **Price as tested** £58,265 **Options** Metallic paint £995, winter pack £1335 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 320 miles (WLTP) **Economy** 3.5mpkWh (WLTP)

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will.rimell@haymarket.com

SNAPSHOTS

VOLVO EX40

Mileage 2665 **Last seen** 26.2.25
One of the impressive things about an EV with a heat pump is how rapidly the windscreen defrosts on an icy cold morning. I didn't time it precisely, but it must have been less than a minute from iced over to completely clear. Bonus points to the EX40 for not decimating its range despite all the climate settings being on full whack. **JW**

SKODA SUPERB

Mileage 2289 **Last seen** 19.2.25
Once the Superb's at speed, its diesel engine is wonderfully smooth. And while the car's natural habitat is clearly A-roads and motorways, it's still comfortable to drive in town: no guarantee given its length and powertrain. It probably helps that the sensibly small wheels' chunky sidewalls don't just ensure a comfortable ride and soak up bumps but also mean I can drive around without much fear of kerbing an alloy. **JA**

MINI COOPER S

Mileage 4120 **Last seen** 26.2.25
Like a car park attendant in Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Steve Cropley returned my Mini with double the miles on the odometer. But rather than drive home backwards and reverse the clock, I've been inspired to keep piling them on. Birmingham, Wellingborough, Shirley, Malvern, Sevenoaks… We've been everywhere(ish) – and I've yet to uncover any major gripes. It's even a decent mobile office. Tales to follow. **FP**

LEXUS RX

Life will be a lot less comfortable now this luxury SUV has left us

WHY WE RAN IT To find out if the original hybrid luxury SUV is still the best

A little over 20 years ago, I was sent to cover the launch of the second-generation Lexus RX for Autocar. At the time it was not much more than a quirky niche player over here yet, thanks to the US market's voracious appetite for it, the world's best-selling SUV.

While it has since gained traction in the UK, it has lost that title to its little brother, the Toyota RAV4 – a car that donated much of its drivetrain to this, the fifth-generation RX, in a search for greater efficiency (presumably in terms of parts commonality as well as fuel consumption).

That means the sweet 3.5-litre V6 of old has been replaced by a 2.5-litre four-banger, but to (more than) make up for it, the RX 450h+ is a plug-in hybrid that offers more power and torque from its electric motors than from its petrol engine, in total mustering a useful 305bhp.

In daily use, particularly around town, that results in a car that feels effortlessly potent, with the muscular torque of the motors meaning you avoid the wearing droning so common among CVT-equipped cars.

On a longer journey, however, when the battery's charge has been exhausted, you can feel the lack of torque – on petrol alone, there's a fairly lightweight 167lb ft – and it's vocal (albeit not unpleasant) when called upon. Still, Toyota's vast experience in self-charging hybrids means that it's quick to generate enough power for the next overtake.

Once charged of a morning, it defaults to EV mode, and for such a big car with a relatively small motor, it is reasonably efficient. In warmer weather, it averaged 2.5mpkWh, dropping to 2.3mpkWh when really chilly, so even in winter it's possible to get close to the official claim of 42 miles. It's enough for my commute, and having a charger at home makes it ideal, but most of the time I've tended to switch to hybrid mode in order to prolong battery life.

With a pretty meagre 55-litre fuel tank, the range on petrol alone isn't huge; it still prioritises electric power at low speeds, but moves over to the engine more readily at the kind of pace that is

Ride was always great, even if performance sometimes wasn't

Plush cabin is especially serene once hybrid RX switches to EV mode

> "There are few better cars for a long journey, especially if you have dogs or lots of bags"

Who thought this was a better solution than a traditional handle?

Wireless phone charger was one of many luxury goodies going to sap battery life.

Although rapid, the RX is definitely more comfortable cruising than really pressing on. Sport mode makes it livelier, but this isn't a sporty machine. The steering is fluid and well weighted and it covers ground at a deceptive rate with decent body control, but the poor lock and the sense of well over two tonnes changing direction mean it isn't something you could call agile.

Yet there are few better cars for a long journey, especially if you have dogs or lots of bags. Not only is the RX exquisitely comfortable, with fantastic seats, superb refinement, intuitive controls and efficient heating, but it's also practical, with a large boot and thoughtful detailing such as a bin for the charging leads beneath the boot floor.

There's also the subconscious pleasure of its build quality, which feels superb and comparable to premium rivals in areas such as the lovely soft-touch headliner.

Initially I found myself irritated by the seemingly incessant beeping from the speed warnings and the driver attention monitor, but bearing in mind that I got caught speeding after turning off the former and am no longer hearing the latter (so must be paying more attention), I can't complain.

Other minor debits include headlights that aren't as bright as I would have liked on dipped beam and further beeping when I tried to lock the car before the boot had fully latched, while my family – even after three months with the car – continued to complain about the doors. As the seals are thick (part of the reason for that refinement), they don't always shut on first close, but the real source of irritation was the electronic door releases in place of a traditional handle.

At least we haven't had the problem suffered by reader Bob Toon, who got locked in his RX for over an hour and had to smash the window to get out.

Ken Richards has had a much more positive experience with a near-twin for my car, averaging 73mpg over his first 7000 miles, doing most of his driving in EV mode. "The car is immensely comfortable, faultless and simply wafts along," he says, "and the customer care offered by the dealer [Lexus Edinburgh] is outstanding."

I'm pretty much on the same page. Back in 2003, I concluded that it was difficult to see past the contemporary BMW X5 if you were after a luxury SUV. Fast forward 22 years and I've been fortunate enough to run an X5 xDrive50e and this RX in quick succession, so does that still ring true? Yes and no: the BMW remains the benchmark if you want your SUV to be fun to drive, but the Lexus feels better built, is more efficient and is better value, spec for spec. I think the (slightly more mature) me of 2025 would find it a much more difficult decision.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

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SECOND OPINION

I ran one of the first hybrid RXs many moons ago, and I just love the quietness of them, even compared with most modern hybrids. They're so relaxing and comfortable, especially around town. The engine of this new version isn't as smooth as the old V6, but the overall refinement is even better. **JB**

TEST DATA

LEXUS RX 450H+ F SPORT DESIGN

MILEAGE

At start 1670
At end 4854

PRICES

List price new £69,995
List price now £70,795
Price as tested £70,245

OPTIONS

Sonic Platinum special metallic paint £250

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed economy 256.8mpg
Fuel tank 55 litres
Test average 57.8mpg
Test best 95.5mpg
Test worst 27.1mpg
Real-world range 699 miles

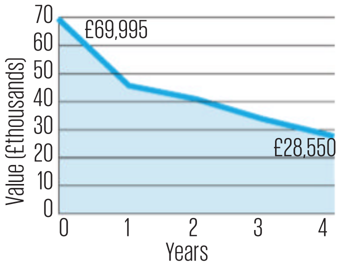
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-62mph 6.5sec
Top speed 113mph
Engine 4 cyls in line, 2487cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Max power 182bhp at 6000rpm (engine), 180bhp (front motor), 53bhp (rear motor), 305bhp (combined)
Max torque 167lb ft at 3200-3700rpm (engine), 199lb ft (front motor), 89lb ft (rear motor)
Gearbox e-CVT, 4WD
Boot 461 litres
Wheels 8.0Jx21in, alloy
Tyres 235/50 R21, Bridgestone Alenza
Kerb weight 2240kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £600.62 pcm
CO_2 25g/km
Service costs None
Other costs None
Petrol costs £285.72
Electricity costs £166.80
Running costs including fuel £452.52
Cost per mile 14 pence
Faults None

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

8 Jan, 22 Jan, 29 Jan, 5 Feb, 26 Feb

LOVE IT

SITTING COMFORTABLY
Lexus has become a watchword for comfort, and the RX lived up to that. I just wish my armchairs at home were this good.

EYES ON THE ROAD
I'm a fan of head-up displays, and the RX's is particularly clever, showing which buttons you're pressing so you needn't look.

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW
Wipers are rarely worthy of comment, but the silence and efficiency of these ones, with their built-in jets, are remarkable.

LOATHE IT

POINTLESS PADDLES
I tried the paddle shifters on the wheel, realised it's an e-CVT and they make no difference, and never touched them again.

IN THE GUTTER
The low-slung doors gathered all manner of muck at the bottom and you need to take care not to catch them on high kerbs.

HOW TO BUY AN ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE

THE CLASS-TOPPING ASTON WITH OLD-SCHOOL CHARM

Mk2 Vantage was our top pick when it arrived in 2018 – and now it's £60k

If you have a wad of cash to splurge on a luxurious and fast sports coupé but don't want to follow the crowd into a Porsche 911, allow us to posit its brawling British rival.

"We can't think of another super-sports car that would make you smile more often" is how we described the second-generation Aston Martin V8 Vantage when we road tested it in 2018. We fell for its old-school V8 charm and impressive dynamics so utterly that it was our pick of the super-sports car class at the time.

Depreciation hasn't been kind to the Aston, but that's good news for prospective used buyers, because you can now bag a tidy example for around £65,000, which is roughly £100k less than the latest Vantage.

But if that tantalising saving alone doesn't have you leaping for your laptop to boot up the classifieds, perhaps you'll be convinced by the Vantage's awesome firepower.

There were some reservations that a Mercedes-AMG-sourced twin-turbo V8 would fail to imbue Aston's entry-level sports car with the character it needed to fend off rivals from McLaren and Audi. But with 503bhp and 505lb ft of torque, the AMG V8 was more than up to the task, propelling the car from 0-60mph in a mere 3.7sec.

A test drive of a McLaren 540C or Audi R8 will reveal that they're tangibly faster cars, but the Vantage will win you over for how it trades all-out pace for real drama when you're flexing its muscles. It sounds immense whether you're pootling along at low speeds or snatching ratios from its snappy eight-speed

Switchgear makes it easy to operate; driving position is low-slung

What we said then

23 MAY 2018

"The Vantage brings real breadth to the super-sports car class and covers a lot of territory. It's a car you could drive every day if you chose to, and probably more easily, comfortably and widely than anything with a mid-mounted engine. It can perform at close to supercar pace and now has fully formed track handling credentials, but it is also more characterful and fun at everyday speeds than plenty of its opponents."

automatic gearbox at the redline.

It's never raucous or overbearing day to day, though – and if you're planning to use it for more than just weekend hoons, you should be able to achieve 25mpg on a motorway run. No hypermiler, sure, but it should be able to skip at least every other service station.

Keen self-shifters will be drawn to the seven-speed dog-leg manual, which has a tactile throw that bonds nicely with the V8. Good luck finding one, though: we saw just two in the classifieds as this was written, and an equivalent auto will cost you less.

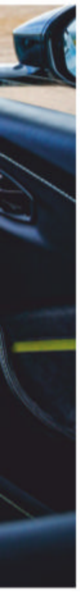
For a stiffly sprung sports car, it rides pretty well and is a comfortable GT over a long distance. But divert onto a mountain pass and the Vantage shows impressive duality in its dynamism, thanks to predictable steering, excellent close body control and trick adaptive dampers. Because it corners with such immediacy, the Vantage is serious fun on track too, with its various modes (Sport+ and Track) turning it from a relaxed GT car to a supercar-baiting circuit weapon.

If you want your Vantage to be even more track-focused, there's the F1 Edition, launched in 2021 to mark Aston's return to Formula 1. With stiffer suspension, an extra 25bhp, faster gearshifts and a suite of aero parts, it has even sharper handling on track – although you will need around £120,000 to buy one today, and there are no interior upgrades over the standard car.

But that's okay, because the Vantage's cockpit was a strong point at launch and it has held up well. There are plenty of physical switches for the secondary controls, lots of cubbyholes and a nice, low driving position. The 8.0in infotainment screen – operated by a rotary dial – is a little dated and you don't get smartphone mirroring, but several specialists such as CBS Automotive can upgrade the system to include wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, which is definitely worth doing.

Sure, it could have some more modern accoutrements, but we're forgiving the Vantage for one simple reason: it's among the most fun, characterful and affordable Astons money can buy.

SAM PHILLIPS



F1 Edition (pictured) is more hardcore but all models are fun on track

"We can't think of another super-sports car that would make you smile more often"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

IAN SLATER

"I bought my 2019 Vantage in April 2021 with 8000 miles on the clock and have done 25,000 miles in it since then. During my ownership, it's been fitted with an aftermarket rear-view camera and CarPlay – both essential.

"The car has been recovered twice: once for an airbag fault and once for a sensor issue, both fixed under warranty. The only bills I've had have been for tyres, corrective work on the seat leather and a battery. A major service is coming up, and that will be £1500. Running costs aside, the only thing that could replace it is another Vantage. It's fast, comfortable and an event every time I drive it."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ENGINE

Coil pack failure is common with the AMG engine due to water getting inside the coil pack itself. An engine management light should appear in the dashboard to highlight the issue. The pack can be replaced under warranty.

■GEARBOX

Be wary of any jerky or hesitant gearshifts from the eight-speed ZF auto. If the 'box is a little sluggish on downshifts, this could be a software-related issue.

■DRIVETRAIN

A whining noise when cruising on the motorway is typically caused by the electronic differential. Most dealers will replace the diff under warranty.

■TYRES

It's always worth checking the tread on the standard-fit Pirelli P Zeros. A set of four new tyres will set you back around £1000. You can fit Michelin Pilot Sport 5s but it won't cost you much less.

■BODY

Check the front splitter and rear diffuser for any scuffs and scratches, and inspect the diamond-cut alloys for any damage because these are expensive to refurbish.

■INFOTAINMENT

The Mercedes-sourced infotainment system is prone to glitches and can be unresponsive to inputs. Ensure any updates have been carried out and check the system works properly on a test drive. Bluetooth connectivity issues and the sat-nav lagging aren't uncommon too.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

The convertible V8 Vantage Roadster is a whisker slower but does enhance the sound of that V8 motor with the roof down – a decent compromise.

Aston Martin launched the V12 Vantage in 2022, with its twin-turbocharged 12-pot boosting output to 690bhp. It's a proper track weapon, but the bigger engine seems to distort rather than necessarily enhance the driving experience.

Limited-run specials include the 007 Edition and beautifully sculpted V12 Speedster. Budget six figures for the latter.

The standard V8 Vantage is £600 to tax annually. A service costs from £700-£1000.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£60,000-£69,999

Early cars with around 20,000-40,000 miles on the clock. Typically, they have few previous owners and low miles.

£70,000-£79,999

Lower-mileage, pristine examples with a full Aston Martin service history and one previous owner.

£80,000-£99,999

More facelifted cars with a low mileage and in nearly new condition. Plenty of coupés and newer Roadsters.

£100,000 AND ABOVE

Immaculate, low-mileage special editions. Predominantly F1 Edition and V12 cars.

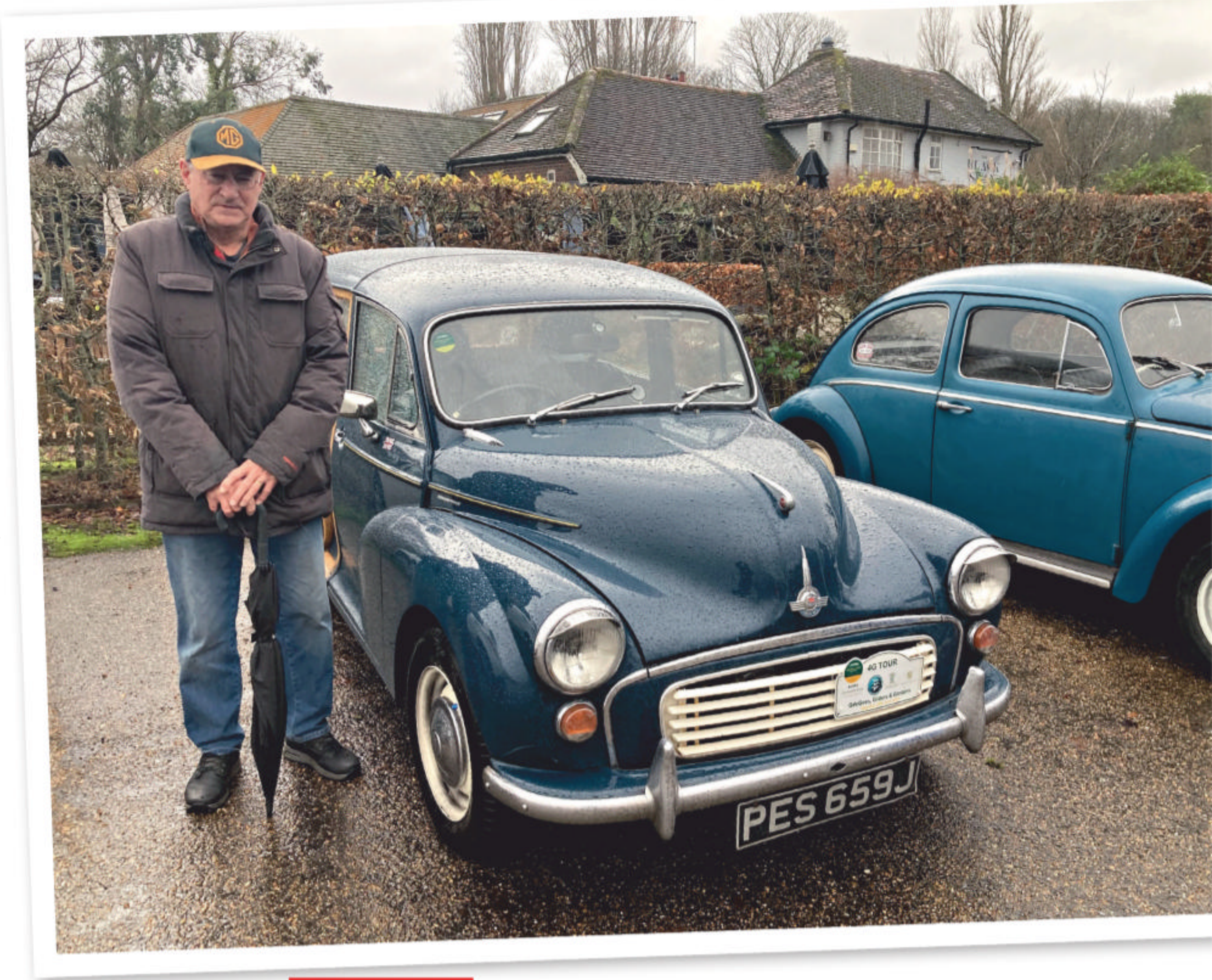
ONE WE FOUND

ASTON MARTIN V8 VANTAGE, 2018, 9000 MILES, £73,995

This stunning Hyper Red coupé is fitted with more than £23k worth of desirable optional extras. It has only one previous owner and a full Aston Martin service history.

My car & I

A Q-car classic for the 21st century



Registered in 1970, Jules Cranwell's 'woody' was one of the last Morris Minor Travellers to be built. It left the Adderley Park production line with a 1098cc A-series engine – fine in its day but, according to Jules, a liability in the 21st century. "In standard trim, the Morris Minor is very slow so I've modified mine a little so that it can keep up with today's traffic," he says.

By 'a little', Jules means the A-Plus engine from a Morris Marina that he has fitted to it in place of the model's old A-series unit but bored out from 1275cc to 1340cc and with race pistons and a modified camshaft. Also, the beefier rear axle from a Wolseley 1500 that he has slotted in and a tougher and more efficient five-speed gearbox from a Ford Sierra. "I've had an indicated 100mph out of the car," he says.

Frankly, in a car as old and primitive as a Traveller, such a speed sounds terrifying and – at least until Jules fitted telescopic dampers all round and replaced the car's standard 3J wheels with the 4.5J ones used on Morris Minor van derivatives – it was rather lively. It was reluctant to stop too, which is why he fitted servo-assisted front disc brakes, again from a Marina.

His Traveller's relationship to the Morris Minor's unloved successor

Our cars

Hang the fuel economy, let's take the Raptor. Again

BY STEVE CROPLEY

I've been doing far more miles in the Ford Ranger Raptor than makes sense (at an average 25mpg) mostly because it's ideal for so many more modes of driving than you'd expect. It's comfortable, mechanically quiet and spacious, has terrific seats, is a superb viewing platform (if you drive to see stuff, as I do) and its Bang & Olufsen hi-fi is far and away the best I own.

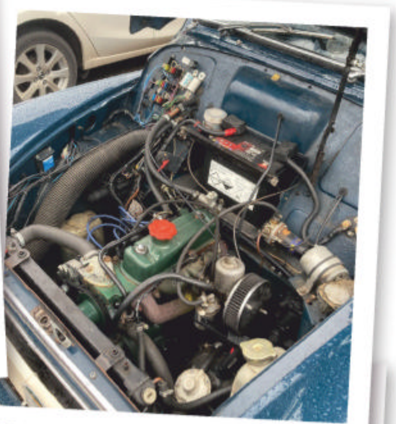
Chuck in the fact that in recent snow it had more grip in auto 4WD than others on the road – to the extent that I feared being rear-ended or sideswiped by people in more conventional transport, slipping all over the road. Mind you, in second, traction isn't brilliant in slippery conditions and you've got to keep a weather eye open for oversteer. Don't tell the world, but a hint of that can be fun.

Two faults: on some surfaces (not all), the tyre hum can be a bit noisy; and the 5.3m-long Raptor doesn't fit a full Tesco car park very well.

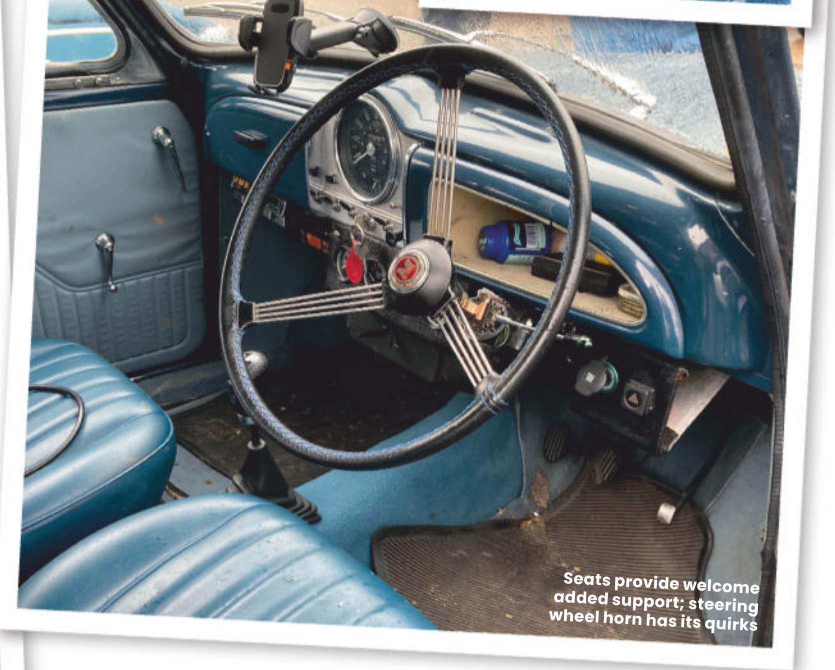
Raptor has been racking up miles because it's so good at so many things

Comfortable cabin and elevated vantage point are appreciated

But for most uses, it's the most comfortable fun car I've ever had, so while I can afford the fuel and insurance, I'm keeping it. As I've said before, it gets a thumbs up from the Steering Committee on comfort grounds. That, I guess, is one big reason why, with four other cars to choose from, I've done 8000 miles in six months.



Engine is a 1340cc A-series with race pistons. Note the hamper/toolbox (left)



Seats provide welcome added support; steering wheel horn has its quirks

risks taking the shine off his efforts but be in no doubt about the quality of Jules' workmanship. A former mechanical engineer who now volunteers at Brooklands, he knows old cars and engines inside out. "I've been rebuilding them since I was 12 years old," he says. "It's a passion."

Still, even some things are a mystery to this talented engineer, such as why his Traveller's horn doesn't work when the steering wheel cowl is fitted: "For some reason, I can't get the horn to work unless the assembly is in the position you see here and without the cowl. The second I move it to the correct position to fit the cowl, the horn goes on strike. I don't understand it."

> **"I've been rebuilding cars and engines since I was 12. It's a passion"**

It's the only black mark on an otherwise lovely interior, made lovelier still by a pair of very comfortable-looking front seats. "They're from Newton Commercial, a classic car trimmer based in Leicester," says Jules. "Some owners think they look too modern but the car goes quite well so I really wanted a headrest and some side support."

Speaking of suppliers, Jules gets many of the parts he needs for his Traveller from East Sussex Morris Minors. "They're fantastic," he says. "Second-hand parts are still widely available too. I've learned to be wary of cheap, pattern parts. Most don't last long."

With Jules tending to it, his souped-up Traveller is proving to be reliable, although it did once burn out a coil. Naturally, there's now a spare in the picnic basket that serves as the car's on-board toolbox.

If it ever develops a more serious fault, Jules always has his other car, a 1963 Sunbeam Alpine, to enjoy. Remarkably, it was his first-ever car. "I got it when I was 17 – 53 years ago," he says. "I've driven it all over Europe and raced it at Spa and Castle Combe. My son has his eye on it. The Traveller will go to my daughter." Perhaps she will solve the riddle of the steering wheel cowl.

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

FELIX PAGE

1997 BENTLEY CONTINENTAL

VS

JONATHAN BRYCE

1996 MERCEDES-BENZ SL 500

Brief: Find a luxury coupé that won't break the bank

FP Don't worry, Jonny - I've taken care of this. You might as well head home. This old-shape Conti is a frankly outrageous amount of car for £20,000. That's Dacia Duster money for a 6.75-litre V8-engined luxury liner - with enough wood and leather inside to deck out a medium-sized hotel.

JB That *is* an outrageous amount of car. Lots of engine, lots of comfort, lots of bills. Expensive bills. But the R129 Mercedes SL 500 is one of the best-built cars ever and it's £6000 cheaper than your pick.

FP Leaving aside the fact that your 'coupé' is actually a convertible, I can't deny the appeal of a Sacco-era Merc 'bahnstormer - but vinyl dash and aftermarket head unit? Not quite decadent enough for me.

JB Who doesn't want open-top, V8 thrills? And you won't need its head unit when you've got a 320bhp V8 to listen to. You'd be pushed to get a faint whisper from your motor.

FP Exactly how it should be. I don't want to wake my neighbours up in the wee hours, but I do want to make them think I've just won the Euromillions...

JB Ah, but mine offers the best of both worlds. It's still an incredibly smooth and refined engine – so much so, in fact, you can balance a coin on it. (Really, there's a video.)

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

MINI CLUBMAN 1.6 COOPER S

2010, 95,500 miles, £3690

Arguably the spiritual successor to the Traveller (left), the Mini Clubman is a quirky, compact family hauler – and this 15-year-old example looks to be in great nick, with a full service history and long MOT. Being a Cooper S, it also has 181bhp.

SUZUKI IGNIS 1.2 DUALJET SHVS SZ5 ALLGRIP

2018, 25,000 miles, £9990

Versatile, well packaged, economical and pleasingly compact, the Ignis is an ideal urban runaround. This one even has four-wheel drive so it's as happy in a muddy field as in town. A long MOT and full history adds to the appeal.

FIAT 500L 1.6 MULTIJET 105 TREKKING

2013, 61,000 miles, £4790

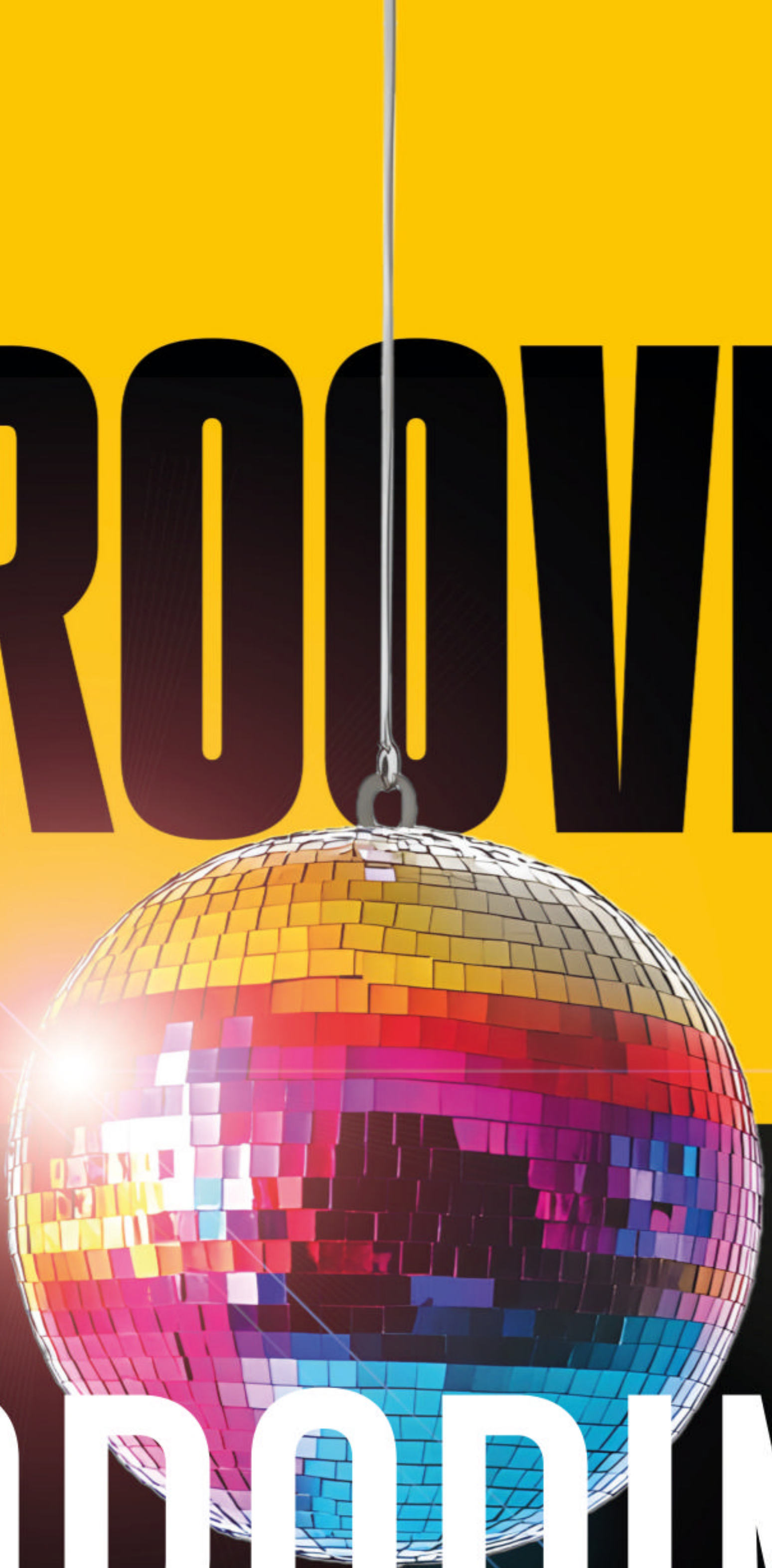
With retro-influenced charm and greater practicality than the Clubman (above), this 500L looks a steal. It's the soft-roader Trekking version too. It has had only two previous owners and is fitted with a frugal diesel.

DACIA JOGGER 1.0 TCE EXPRESSION

2023, 1000 miles, £17,499

As a seven-seat family car, this 1000-mile Jogger holds great appeal. It's easily the most practical and versatile car on this list and Expression trim gives it all the right kit.

GROOVIN’



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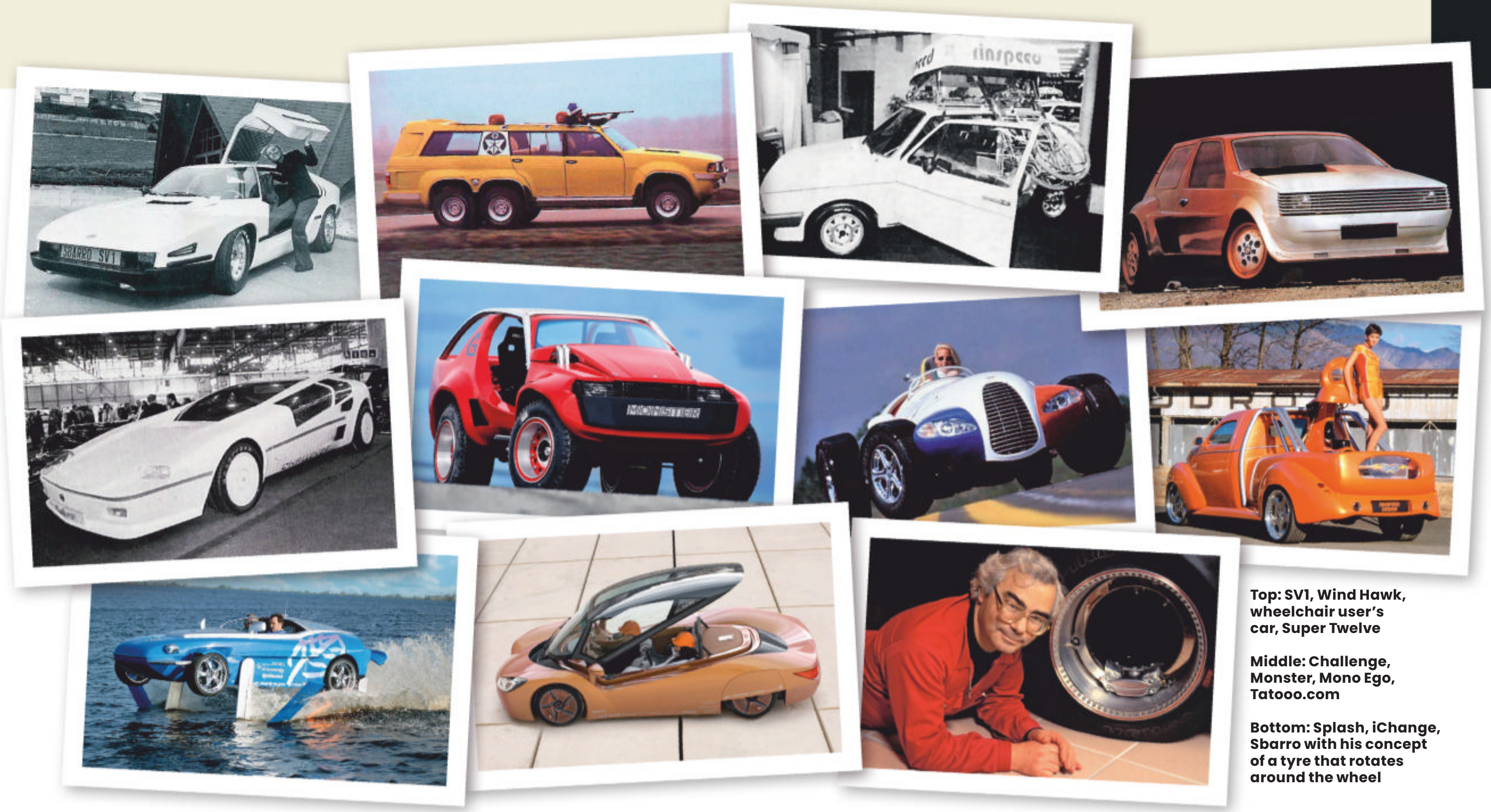
The Autocar Lost in the archive



Top: SV1, Wind Hawk, wheelchair user's car, Super Twelve

Middle: Challenge, Monster, Mono Ego, Tatooo.com

Bottom: Splash, iChange, Sbarro with his concept of a tyre that rotates around the wheel

The mad locals at the Geneva motor show

Traditionally at this time of year, the automotive industry congregates in Geneva for the world's most important motor show – but to our great sadness, last year's event was the last there will ever be.

A sad corollary of this is that we won't get to enjoy our semi-regular laughs at concepts unveiled by Swiss design houses – or should we say mad houses? – Sbarro and Rinspeed.

Italian-born Franco Sbarro began his career as a mechanic, then set up his eponymous firm in 1968 – with zero interest in conventionality.

Sbarro first caught our attention at Geneva in 1973 with the SV1, an attractive sports coupé composed of NSU, Porsche and Volkswagen components – most prominently, two Ro80 rotary engines mounted side by side behind the rear seats!

In 1978, it combined a Fiat four-wheel drive system with a BMW engine in the shell of an "avant-garde cross-country vehicle" – then two years later took this format to a wild extreme, matching a G-Wagen chassis with the 450SE's V8 engine and adding a third axle. The Wind Hawk was, unsurprisingly, destined for the Middle East – just like the AMG G63 6x6 that Mercedes itself would produce 35 years later.

That 1980 show also introduced Autocar to Frank Rinderknecht's Rinspeed, starting fairly sensibly with a small car for disabled drivers featuring a mechanism that hoisted one's wheelchair out, up and into a roof-mounted box.

Perhaps the coolest thing at the 1982 show was Sbarro's Super Twelve, a straight-12 hot hatch. Yes, really: the engine was two Kawasaki motorcycle sixes conjoined, making 240bhp. With a tubular chassis and a fibreglass body, it weighed 800kg – resulting in a better power-to-weight ratio than Lamborghini's Countach.

Two years later, it produced an evolution, the Super Eight, with a Ferrari 308 GTB chassis and V8. This one-off came up for auction in 2024 but fell short of its reserve at $160k.

Sbarro's next show-stealer was the 1985 Challenge, a supercar of truly bizarre proportions with four-wheel drive, a centrally mounted 5.0-litre Mercedes V8, a retractable windscreen and… inflatable seats.

We actually sampled one of six road-registered examples a decade later. It had lost a pair of cylinders but none of the visual impact, and naturally it was "a disappointment to drive, failing to meet your expectations even in a straight line".

The 1987 Monster 4x4 was in a similar vein but had an even bigger Mercedes V8 – 6.9 litres – rotating the enormous wheels of a Boeing 747. Rolling resistance be damned.

Rinspeed spent the 1980s mostly creating sensible (well, relatively, that is) tuned versions of Porsches and whatnot, but in 1997 it decided to join in Sbarro's game, giving us something that "looked like a 1960s front-engined Indycar on acid". That engine was a V8 from, er, Hyundai, a supercharger taking its output to a hefty 410bhp, and all while the Mono Ego weighed no more than a tonne.

It produced something similar for the 1998 show, called the Rocket, again using that Korean V8 but with styling more akin to a pre-war Auto Union grand prix racer – although "we won't go too near the stand, because these cars often disappoint when you get close".

If they had been unconventional in the 1990s, Sbarro and Rinspeed both really let loose in the 2000s, as exemplified by the latter firm's millennium duo: a retro hot-rod pick-up truck with an integrated crane, called the Tatooo.com (huh?), and "an odd underwater scooter that looks like it's from a B-grade Hollywood sci-fi movie", called the Breathing Observation Bubble.

Aquatic machinery became a bit of a theme for Rinspeed, as shown by 2004's Splash. Creating "a tidal wave of interest" (ahem), this was a chunky roadster that could hydraulically transform into not merely a boat but a hydrofoil, elevating it 60cm above the water. And fuelled by compressed natural gas for good measure.

Having made "Dick Dastardly's next car" in 2003 ("good old Franco is still taking the drugs, it seems", we joked), Sbarro in 2007 created a six-wheeled pick-up truck by adding an electrically driven third axle to the… Citroën C-Crosser. Obviously.

In 2009, Rinspeed presented the iChange (everything new had to be 'i' back then, didn't it?), which could alter its shape depending on how many people were inside – although funnily enough it was "cunningly perched on an elevated stand to keep its shape-shifting qualities hidden from the general public".

We gave up reporting on this dynamic duo after that, so irrelevant were their creations to the road, but their presence still always raised a smile. Ssangyong designer Ken Greenley perhaps put it best when he told us in 1999: "I don't like any of the cars here, but Geneva wouldn't be Geneva without Sbarro. I'll give its stand a four out of 10 for being interesting and thought-provoking."

KRIS CULMER

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P24 DDS	£375
N28 DDY	£375
L25 DEK	£375
M600 DES	£375
N31 DEW	£375
A23 DEX	£375
E7 DGD	£275
DGZ 535	£275
DGZ 1147	£75
DGZ 2444	£175
DHZ 771	£275
DIG 7578	£375
W16 DJA	£375
F23 DJF	£375
A24 DJN	£375
OX53 DJS	£175
P121 DJS	£375
N121 DJT	£275
K121 DJW	£375
A24 DLH	£375
P121 DMB	£375
K26 DMG	£375
A23 DMR	£375
A24 DMW	£375
H22 DNG	£375
C21 DNY	£275
G24 DOD	£375
A24 DOL	£375
P24 DOW	£175
E21 DPS	£275
K23 DRB	£375
P27 DRC	£375
K28 DRH	£375
G23 DRM	£375
A23 DRN	£275
G22 DRS	£375
E21 DRU	£375
H21 DSB	£375
A24 DSB	£275
DSZ 114	£275
DSZ 1213	£175
DSZ 2106	£75
DSZ 2107	£75
P121 DUB	£275
K121 DUN	£375
K88 DYL	£375
E21 DYS	£375
H24 EAL	£375
P29 EAM	£275
A23 EAR	£275
H24 EAR	£375
B23 EAT	£375
EAZ 661	£275
A23 ECS	£375
G9 EDE	£375
B21 EDE	£275
K27 EDW	£375
P23 EGG	£275
R29 EGG	£375
P10 EJH	£375
P14 ELE	£375
P55 ELM	£275
L27 ELY	£375
N21 ENN	£375
K121 EON	£375
H14 ERL	£375
A23 ERN	£375
D101 ERN	£175
H22 ERS	£375
L23 ERS	£275
J200 ERY	£275
B24 ESS	£375
A24 EST	£375
A24 EYE	£375
K27 FAB	£375
K121 FAB	£275
P31 FAR	£175
T40 FAR	£375
N28 FAT	£275
K29 FAT	£175
V15 FEB	£375
A23 FEB	£375
P21 FEE	£275
A24 FEE	£375
J24 FEE	£375
N27 FEN	£275
FHZ 878	£375
R111 FJB	£275
FJZ 669	£175
P24 FOS	£375
P800 FOS	£175
J70 FOW	£275
J31 FRS	£375
H16 FRY	£375
K24 FRY	£275
FSZ 1501	£75
FSZ 1502	£75
F24 FUL	£375
M100 FUL	£375
K27 GAB	£375
R121 GAB	£275
T26 GBR	£175
GBZ 566	£275
J10 GEF	£375
K31 GEF	£275
Y999 GEF	£175
L21 GEL	£375
N27 GEN	£375
S999 GEN	£275
L15 GGB	£275
K24 GJB	£375
P800 GJB	£175
A24 GJH	£375
F24 GJH	£275
T333 GJH	£175
B14 GOS	£275
E23 GRM	£375
GSZ 3527	£49
GSZ 3699	£75
XO53 GXS	£75
P23 HAD	£275
P100 HAD	£175
P27 HAW	£275
T90 HAW	£375
K26 HED	£375
P99 HED	£275
K23 HEP	£375
PW51 HER	£75
A23 HEV	£375
K23 HEW	£275
HIG 5556	£275
E21 HLS	£275
S900 HOB	£375
S963 HOB	£175
N27 HOD	£275
Y121 HOT	£275
C21 HOY	£375
HSZ 4024	£75
HSZ 4042	£75
HSZ 7054	£49
N28 HUL	£375
N29 HUN	£275
L99 HUW	£375
IAZ 344	£375
IDZ 773	£175
IKZ 446	£375
IXZ 3253	£75
S19 JAA	£275
A23 JAA	£175
E24 JAP	£375
J321 JAW	£375
H24 JBC	£375
JBZ 778	£375
K17 JCC	£375
A24 JCG	£275
A23 JCR	£375
F13 JDB	£375
A17 JDD	£375
D25 JDM	£375
T27 JEB	£275
E23 JEE	£275
P28 JEL	£375
T23 JER	£175
M24 JER	£375
L29 JER	£375
K99 JER	£275
T121 JER	£75
JEZ 7278	£375
JEZ 7672	£275
JGZ 1014	£175
JGZ 5596	£75
T11 JHB	£375
P333 JJB	£375
B76 JJC	£375
A24 JJD	£375
Y28 JJD	£275
W600 JJM	£375
A24 JJP	£375
K29 JKB	£175
Y500 JLB	£375
L80 JLD	£375
K27 JLH	£375
K321 JLH	£275
H22 JLW	£375
R55 JMA	£375
Y121 JMB	£375
L121 JME	£375
J121 JMG	£375
K123 JMH	£375
K23 JMR	£375
P555 JMR	£175
K55 JMT	£375
P21 JOB	£375
K23 JOD	£375
K27 JOS	£375
K321 JOS	£275
E782 JOY	£275
K321 JPB	£375
P121 JPC	£175
K121 JPH	£375
W11 JPK	£175
K321 JPM	£375
Y900 JPR	£175
J121 JPS	£375
N555 JPS	£275
H24 JRP	£375
JRZ 166	£375
JRZ 2329	£175
H22 JSC	£375
A23 JSD	£375
P222 JSM	£275
K26 JSS	£275
F24 JSW	£375
K28 JSW	£275
N29 JTB	£275
N21 JUN	£375
P23 JUS	£175
R29 JUS	£275
P28 KAB	£375
J123 KAB	£375
E24 KAH	£275
P21 KAN	£275
A24 KAV	£275
M28 KAV	£375
P28 KEE	£375
N321 KER	£375
A24 KES	£375
N24 KEY	£375
KIG 151	£375
J123 KJB	£375
E17 KJP	£275
E21 KLS	£375
J24 KMC	£375
KRZ 7567	£75
KRZ 7568	£49
L26 KYL	£275
H21 KYS	£375
B25 LAC	£375
D25 LAC	£375
P23 LAD	£375
B22 LAG	£375
A24 LAG	£275
P27 LAH	£375
E21 LAK	£375
B23 LAK	£175
A22 LAR	£375
B23 LAR	£275
E22 LAT	£375
B21 LAX	£275
F22 LAX	£275
T28 LEC	£375
B20 LEG	£275
N99 LEG	£175
L700 LEG	£375
A23 LEM	£375
P24 LER	£375
N25 LER	£275
R21 LET	£275
K23 LET	£375
N15 LEV	£375
LGZ 3565	£175
LGZ 6323	£75
LIG 9721	£175
J123 LJB	£375
K123 LJS	£375
J321 LJW	£375
H21 LLB	£275
H21 LLD	£275
K27 LLE	£275
H21 LLG	£175
J21 LLG	£275
H21 LLM	£375
H21 LLP	£175
D21 LLR	£275
A21 LLX	£375
N29 LOC	£375
F24 LOG	£375
P44 LON	£375
K28 LOO	£375
K123 LOR	£275
K24 LOV	£175
N24 LOV	£375
F21 LSY	£375
S800 LUC	£375
LUI 272	£375
M26 LUM	£375
K21 LUV	£175
F22 LYD	£375
J321 LYD	£375
F21 LYY	£275
A23 LYY	£375
G22 MAA	£375
K24 MAF	£375
J31 MAM	£375
R123 MAW	£275
P200 MCA	£275
A24 MCJ	£175
N24 MCP	£375
C26 MCS	£375
K321 MCS	£275
K23 MCT	£375
G41 MCT	£275
J123 MCT	£375
P24 MCW	£375
K29 MCW	£375
K123 MCW	£275
C24 MDB	£375
K50 MDB	£275
L555 MDS	£375
K26 MEC	£375
P26 MED	£275
N70 MED	£175
H21 MEE	£375
K27 MEE	£375
EL04 MER	£275
K321 MET	£275
R321 MET	£175
G23 MFC	£375
A24 MGB	£275
B24 MGB	£375
E18 MGM	£275
MGZ 4895	£75
MGZ 4896	£75
P13 MHW	£75
K121 MJG	£375
MJI 799	£375
K121 MJK	£275
K27 MJL	£375
N121 MJP	£275
J121 MJR	£375
L700 MJR	£275
J123 MJT	£375
G23 MLC	£375
A23 MLD	£375
P99 MLH	£375
K121 MLS	£175
A24 MLW	£275
E23 MMB	£375
L28 MMB	£275
E22 MMC	£375
J15 MOE	£375
P77 MOE	£275
K121 MOE	£175
K121 MOG	£375
H9 MOW	£375
A24 MOW	£175
S70 MOW	£275
P88 MOW	£275
D24 MPW	£275
A24 MPY	£275
C26 MRH	£375
R111 MRH	£375
J121 MRH	£375
K121 MRK	£375
A23 MRL	£375
K321 MRP	£275
L123 MRT	£375
E24 MRY	£375
MRZ 2639	£175
K26 MSH	£275
E24 MSS	£375
K121 MSS	£175
K27 MSW	£275
H22 MTB	£375
Y25 MTB	£275
B22 MTH	£375
Y24 MTH	£275
MUI 881	£375
C22 MUS	£375
E22 MUS	£275
MXZ 3310	£175
A21 MYM	£275
Y14 NAG	£375
P24 NAP	£375
R29 NAP	£175
T28 NAR	£375
N29 NAR	£275
A23 NDW	£375
P23 NED	£275
R28 NED	£375
L28 NGE	£275
Y121 NGE	£175
A23 NGL	£375
A23 NGY	£275
NGZ 1012	£75
NGZ 1022	£75
K321 NJH	£275
G23 NJP	£375
NJZ 227	£175
GU54 NNE	£175
P31 NNN	£275
A23 NNS	£275
A22 NNT	£175
A23 NNY	£275
C24 NOE	£375
W44 NOV	£175
NRZ 474	£275
A21 NSE	£375
A24 NSL	£375
A22 NTY	£275
A24 NUT	£275
L27 NUT	£375
A21 NYS	£275
C23 OAT	£375
B22 OBB	£375
H21 OBY	£275
OBZ 552	£275
A21 OCH	£275
P23 OCT	£275
H22 ODG	£375
J23 OEE	£275
OGZ 5449	£175
OJZ 878	£275
P28 OLD	£375
T31 OLD	£275
N31 ONG	£375
C21 OPP	£375
H23 ORN	£375
H22 OSK	£175
C21 OTS	£275
H21 OTS	£275
B21 OVE	£375
N21 OVE	£375
H23 OVE	£375
H23 OWL	£375
K28 OWL	£275
OXZ 1031	£175
E21 OYD	£375
H21 OYD	£375
K31 OYD	£275
K321 PAC	£275
S200 PAD	£375
K31 PAP	£275
K121 PAS	£275
A633 PAT	£375
L29 PAW	£375
C8 PBW	£375
A4 PCD	£375
K23 PEG	£375
R121 PEG	£75
M121 PER	£275
J123 PER	£375
S300 PES	£275
K23 PET	£375
N7 PEX	£275
PGZ 1264	£75
PGZ 1265	£75
L321 PJB	£375
L23 PJC	£375
H24 PJG	£375
R222 PJM	£375
N21 PJS	£375
K26 PJW	£375
K121 PJW	£275
A15 PLC	£275
PLZ 262	£275
V121 PMC	£275
D20 PMS	£175
JG05 POT	£175
N25 POT	£275
K31 PPP	£175
K21 PPS	£275
A24 PRK	£375
L27 PRO	£375
PRZ 1012	£175
PRZ 2635	£75
E23 PUD	£375
K27 PUD	£275
K23 PUG	£375
N27 PUG	£275
J50 PUL	£375
PXI 966	£275
PXZ 1834	£75
PXZ 1835	£75
A23 RAL	£275
N27 RAL	£175
RAZ 1258	£375
RAZ 1370	£275
P111 RDA	£75
G24 RDD	£275
A24 RDH	£275
P121 REB	£275
M666 REL	£275
G007 RES	£75
K31 RES	£175
Y111 REX	£275
P700 REX	£175
C7 RFH	£275
RFZ 221	£175
RGZ 1018	£175
RGZ 2807	£75
RJZ 191	£275
L28 RKS	£275
RKZ 878	£275
E24 RLL	£275
H23 RMB	£275
K121 RMS	£275
A23 RMW	£275
K23 ROE	£275
L24 ROE	£275
A15 ROJ	£275
A23 ROL	£175
L24 ROL	£275
L600 ROW	£275
RRZ 1089	£75
RRZ 1206	£175
RRZ 1207	£175
K26 RSB	£275
G24 RUB	£175
K23 RYE	£275
K27 SAC	£275
A23 SAK	£275
R121 SAW	£275
SBZ 337	£275
H19 SCR	£275
P31 SEC	£275
K21 SED	£275
K25 SEP	£175
P321 SER	£175
P121 SES	£275
T944 SET	£75
SEZ 774	£275
SGZ 122	£275
SGZ 2357	£75
SGZ 2358	£175
SGZ 2359	£175
P27 SHO	£275
P29 SHP	£275
K123 SHY	£275
SHZ 3591	£375
SIG 1032	£275
K26 SKA	£275
L121 SLS	£275
H23 SMD	£275
Y300 SMR	£175
E22 SMY	£275
T29 SOO	£275
R121 SOO	£175
K26 SOP	£275
H23 SPR	£275
L321 SPY	£275
SRZ 1265	£75
SRZ 1361	£175
K31 SSO	£275
N60 SUL	£175
P888 SUL	£275
K600 SUS	£175
P800 SUS	£275
SXZ 2052	£75
SXZ 2053	£75
K121 TAB	£175
P21 TAC	£275
P54 TAD	£175
N25 TAF	£275
L27 TAJ	£275
H24 TAL	£275
L400 TAP	£275
P121 TAS	£275
K21 TAT	£275
TAZ 1785	£375
N27 TEE	£275
TGZ 1581	£175
K28 THE	£275
THZ 1829	£75
TIG 1698	£275
TJZ 252	£375
K27 TMB	£175
H21 TNY	£275
N653 TOD	£175
A24 TOP	£275
AS05 TOR	£275
P121 TOR	£275
L111 TPH	£75
P111 TRH	£75
TRZ 1348	£175
TRZ 1349	£175
TRZ 1352	£75
K28 TTH	£275
P28 TTT	£275
P121 TTT	£175
D23 UFO	£275
UIG 1216	£75
URZ 2234	£75
URZ 3274	£49
T29 USA	£175
E24 VEE	£275
K321 VEN	£275
VIG 122	£275
VIG 1027	£75
K31 VOS	£175
VRZ 3282	£75
VRZ 3283	£75
VRZ 3284	£75
N27 WAG	£275
P321 WAG	£175
K121 WAY	£175
A23 WBA	£275
P24 WED	£275
R121 WED	£75
S900 WED	£175
LO10 WES	£275
N121 WES	£275
Y400 WES	£175
WEZ 7800	£275
WHZ 1019	£275
WIG 116	£375
WIG 2158	£175
WIG 2159	£175
K23 WLS	£275
XIG 3678	£75
XIG 3867	£75
YHZ 1490	£49
YHZ 1491	£75
YUI 1425	£75
YUI 1479	£49

REGISTRATIONS URGENTLY WANTED FOR IMMEDIATE PURCHASE

ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of the independent, objective and empirical road testing of new cars is the longest in the world. But like everything that endures, our road testing process has always moved with the times.

Until recently, it was thought that our first instrumented road test report was published on an Austin Seven in April 1928, but fresh research has lately revealed that the tradition is older still.

For more than a century, these road tests have been verifying, describing and illustrating the performance and characteristics in close detail, one new car at a time. Driving impressions have always been a key component part of them, around which other elements have changed. In early years, these test elements included benchmarking of braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later they expanded to take in acceleration, top speed and stopping distance, as well as cruising noise level. Cabin dimensions and measured weight became included too.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated state of charge. All are key indicators of the integrity of vehicle engineering in this emerging era.

Some of our road tests also include lap-time performance benchmarks where appropriate, but all are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car - and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

You can dig deeper into their findings and learn more about more than a century of road tests with a subscription to the ever-expanding digital Autocar Archive (visit themagazineshop.com/aca23ed/aca).

Matt Saunders, road test editor

ABARTH

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-

ALFA ROMEO

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Spry-handling SUV is likeable, if short of the class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-

ALPINE

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-

ARIEL

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atom 4 ★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-

ASTON MARTIN

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vantage ★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
DBX ★★★★⯪	28.10.20	Does everyday driver appeal better than any other super-SUV.	4.6	3.8	2328	24.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-

AUDI

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS4 Avant ★★★★☆	14.2.18	A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S4 TDI ★★★★☆	18.9.19	Diesel power sparks an appealingly different identity for this fast Audi.	4.6	4.1	1871	54.3	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A5 Sportback 2.0 TFSI 252PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★⯪☆	8.3.17	Sleek mid-sized executive fastback is still short of a selling point beyond its style.	5.7	5.3	1535	41.1	-
A6 Avant 40 TDI S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆	14.11.18	High-tech throwback is a timely reminder of what Audi does best.	8.4	7.5	1710	50.1	-
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line ★★★★☆	5.1.22	Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 2.0 TDI 190PS Quattro S Line S Tronic ★★★★☆	15.3.17	Like the previous Q5 but with additional class, dynamism and polish.	8.3	8.5	1770	42.5	-
SQ5 TSI Quattro ★★★⯪☆	21.6.17	Mid-sized performance SUV bites off more than it can chew.	5.5	5.0	1870	32.6	-
SQ5 Sportback TDI Quattro ★★★⯪☆	3.8.22	Not the sharpest fast SUV, but the real-world appeal is clear to see.	5.1	4.6	2023	49.0	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	–	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆	12.8.15	Chiselled, plush, suave and spacious. Only so-so to drive, though.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-

BENTLEY

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT W12 First Edition ★★★★⯪	2.5.18	Superb luxury coupé has added dynamism but not enough to top the class.	3.6	2.9	2295	26.4	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Flying Spur W12 ★★★★⯪	15.7.20	Trounces rivals for driver appeal but not in every way that matters.	3.9	3.2	2500	32.5	-
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

BMW

120 M Sport ★★★⯪☆ **31.12.24**
Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.
7.3 6.8 1489 45.8 -

218i M Sport Gran Coupé
★★★☆☆ **8.4.20**
Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.
8.8 8.4 1375 58.2 -

220i M Sport Coupé ★★★★☆ **1.6.22**
A good coupé rather than a great sports car.
7.3 7.3 1546 46.8 -

M2 Coupé Manual ★★★★⯪ **12.7.23**
Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.
4.5 3.8 1687 32.1 -

320d M Sport Auto ★★★★★ **15.5.19**
BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.
6.9 6.8 1639 63.3 -

330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring ★★★★⯪ **15.1.20**
An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.
5.5 5.2 1922 52.6 -

330e M Sport ★★★★⯪ **1.7.20**
Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.
- - 1740 - -

M440i xDrive ★★★★☆ **6.1.21**
A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.
4.1 3.7 1775 44.0 -

M4 Competition ★★★★⯪ **21.4.21**
A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.
3.9 2.9 1800 32.7 -

i4 M50 ★★★★☆ **19.1.22**
Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.
4.1 3.2 2248 - 186

M4 CSL ★★★★☆ **16.11.22**
A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.
3.6 2.7 1625 31.1 -

M5 ★★★⯪☆ **29.1.25**
A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.
3.5 2.8 2373 27.3 35

i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro ★★★⯪☆ **29.11.23**
Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.
5.4 4.4 2213 - 235

550e xDrive M Sport Pro
★★★★☆ **3.4.24**
Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.
4.4 3.5 2232 40.1 47

i7 xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★⯪ **15.2.23**
It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.
4.5 3.4 2758 - 264

840d xDrive ★★★★☆ **16.1.19**
A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.
5.0 4.6 1901 49.2 -

M8 Competition Convertible
★★★⯪☆ **5.2.20**
Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.
3.3 2.7 2020 31.6 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

M8 Competition ★★★⯪☆ **3.6.20**
Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.
- - 1960 - -

X1 xDrive23i M Sport ★★★⯪☆ **25.1.23**
A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.
6.4 6.0 1800 45.6 -

X4 M Competition ★★★☆☆ **13.11.19**
Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.
4.0 3.3 2028 29.0 -

X5 xDrive30d M Sport ★★★★☆ **2.1.19**
Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.
6.6 6.6 2279 43.1 -

X6 M Competition ★★★☆☆ **20.3.24**
Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.
3.5 3.1 2442 29.3 -

X7 M50i M Performance xDrive
★★★★☆ **9.9.20**
Stunningly large and enviably refined but too excessive for many.
4.8 3.9 2583 30.5 -

X7 M60i xDrive ★★★★☆ **29.3.23**
Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.
4.2 3.7 2600 28.9 -

iX xDrive50 M Sport ★★★★⯪ **2.3.22**
Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.
4.4 3.4 2593 - 252

Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack
★★★★☆ **21.8.24**
Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.
5.7 5.9 1561 36.9 -

BMW ALPINA

B3 GT Touring ★★★★⯪ **15.1.25**
Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.
3.3 2.7 1910 29.4 -

B8 Gran Coupé ★★★★☆ **22.9.21**
Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.
3.5 2.8 2100 - -

BYD

Atto 3 Design ★★★☆☆ **31.5.23**
Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.
7.0 6.2 1787 - 201

Seal Design ★★★⯪☆ **17.1.24**
Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.
5.8 4.7 2116 - 279

CATERHAM

Seven 160 ★★★★☆ **20.11.13**
Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.
8.4 8.7 510 44.8 -

Seven 620S ★★★★⯪ **9.3.16**
Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.
3.8 4.2 650 29.5 -

Seven 420 Cup ★★★★⯪ **31.8.22**
Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.
4.2 3.4 560 35.3 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

CHEVROLET

Corvette 3LT ★★★★☆ **22.6.22**
Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.
3.9 3.2 1679 32.9 -

Corvette Z06 3LZ ★★★★☆ **16.8.23**
Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.
3.1 2.4 1670 26.1 -

CITROEN

Ami Colour ★★⯪☆☆ **11.1.23**
Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.
- - 471 - 39

C3 Puretech 110 Flair ★★★⯪☆ **28.12.16**
Dynamically challenged, but a cheery design makes this supermini interesting.
9.6 9.4 1050 62.3 -

C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair
★★★⯪☆ **7.3.18**
Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.
11.5 10.7 1159 39.5 -

C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto
★★★☆☆ **26.5.21**
Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.
9.5 9.2 1320 56.4 -

ë-C4 X Shine ★★★⯪☆ **3.5.23**
EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.
9.7 8.8 1623 - 162

C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus
★★★⯪☆ **13.2.19**
Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.
9.0 8.5 1540 47.8 -

C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus
★★★★☆ **28.9.22**
Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.
7.8 7.1 1502 47.8 -

CUPRA

Born 204PS 58kWh V3 ★★★⯪☆ **6.7.22**
As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.
6.7 6.2 1794 - 220

Born VZ First Edition ★★★★☆ **9.10.24**
An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.
5.4 4.2 1996 3.5 269

Leon Estate 310PS VZ3 ★★★★☆ **8.9.21**
Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.
4.9 4.3 1707 40.1 -

Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2 ★★★★☆ **27.7.22**
Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.
5.9 4.7 1468 43.4 -

Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG ★★★⯪☆ **23.1.19**
Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.
4.9 4.4 1615 36.7 -

Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG
★★★★⯪ **3.2.21**
Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.
5.1 4.3 1583 36.4 -

Tavascan V1 ★★★☆☆ **5.2.25**
Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.
6.0 5.0 2129 3.2 246

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

DACIA

Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige
★★★★☆ **28.4.21**
Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.
11.9 11.9 1096 54.1 -

Duster SCe 115 4x2 Comfort
★★★★☆ **22.8.18**
Comfortable, simple SUV keeps its budget family motoring star quality.
13.1 12.6 1286 42.2 -

Duster Hybrid 140 Journey
★★★★⯪ **27.11.24**
Notably improved yet barely any pricier.
9.7 8.7 1413 40.2 -

Jogger TCe 110 Comfort ★★★★⯪ **20.4.22**
Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.
11.0 11.0 1267 48.5 -

DS

3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige
★★★☆☆ **10.7.19**
No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.
8.8 8.3 1205 48.6 -

4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+
★★★⯪☆ **29.6.22**
High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.
7.4 6.0 1706 44.7 26

7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige
★★★⯪☆ **19.9.18**
DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.
8.6 7.0 1616 44.6 -

7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première
★★★⯪☆ **26.4.23**
More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.
5.7 4.6 1956 36.6 29

9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus
★★★⯪☆ **2.2.22**
Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.
8.6 7.1 1886 44.7 20

FERRARI

296 GTB ★★★★★ **21.12.22**
Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.
2.7 1.9 1648 37.8 15

SF90 Stradale ★★★★☆ **3.11.21**
Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.
2.5 1.8 1698 24.4 16

FIAT

Panda 1.2 Easy ★★★★⯪ **25.4.12**
Was everything a city car ought to be but is now way past its prime.
14.6 15.6 1020 49.1 -

Panda 4x4 Twinair ★★★★☆ **17.4.13**
A lovable four-wheel-drive miniature that trades space for style and charm.
14.6 15.8 1195 44.2 -

500 1.4 Lounge ★★★★☆ **19.9.07**
Enjoyable city car with the substance to back up its style.
10.3 10.4 1065 42.8 -

500C 1.2 Pop ★★★★☆ **5.8.09**
Landaulet hits the spot every bit as well as the regular hatchback and is often better.
13.2 14.4 1035 48.3 -

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★⯪☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★⯪☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fiesta 1.0 Ecoboost 125PS Titanium	★★★★⯪	9.8.17	A dynamically brilliant supermini but no longer the best one.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Fiesta ST	★★★★⯪	15.8.18	Great to drive and supreme value but not better than before in all aspects.	6.6	7.8	1218	48.2	-
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X	★★★★⯪	20.2.19	Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST	★★★★☆	11.9.19	Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium	★★★★⯪	25.3.20	The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma ST	★★★★☆	24.3.21	Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD	★★★⯪☆	23.10.24	Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line	★★★⯪☆	24.6.20	Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD	★★★★☆	23.6.21	Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD	★★★☆☆	27.4.22	Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse	★★★⯪☆	20.11.24	Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium	★★★⯪☆	10.7.24	Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited	★★★★☆	8.5.24	Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak	★★★★⯪	14.6.23	Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-
F-150 Lightning Platinum	★★★⯪☆	17.5.23	Electric truck has huge utility and appealing range, but its size and price will put many off.	4.5	3.7	3121	-	288

GENESIS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line	★★★⯪☆	10.11.21	Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80	★★★⯪☆	12.10.22	Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus	★★★★☆	24.8.22	Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater	★★★⯪☆	15.9.21	Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM ORA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition	★★⯪☆☆	1.2.23	Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance	★★★⯪☆	26.8.20	More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX	★★★⯪☆	7.10.20	Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT	★★★★⯪	25.10.17	Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style	★★★⯪☆	24.11.21	Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance	★★★☆☆	1.11.23	EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium	★★★★☆	15.4.20	Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect	★★★⯪☆	24.2.21	Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N	★★★★⯪	25.8.21	N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE	★★★⯪☆	13.9.17	Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
i30 N Performance	★★★⯪☆	28.12.17	Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.	6.4	5.6	1478	43.1	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	7.6.23	Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance	★★★★☆	6.9.23	Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium	★★★★☆	17.3.21	Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N	★★★★★	7.8.24	A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium	★★★★☆	16.10.24	A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo	★★★⯪☆	12.6.19	Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster	★★★⯪☆	20.9.23	Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAGUAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.15	Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD	★★★⯪☆	17.4.19	Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE	★★★⯪☆	11.4.18	Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S	★★★★⯪	12.9.18	Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace SVR	★★★★⯪	24.7.19	Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★⯪	1.12.21	Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type V8 S Convertible	★★★★☆	12.6.13	As good to drive as it is to behold – but at a material and financial cost.	4.0	3.4	1810	28.5	-
F-Type 2.0 R-Dynamic Coupé	★★★★☆	22.11.17	Plenty of driver appeal, but its cracking chassis merits a better engine.	5.7	5.1	1640	43.6	-
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé	★★★★☆	29.4.20	The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit	★★★⯪☆	24.1.24	Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-

TOP 3

CHEAPEST NEW CARS

1 Dacia Sandero

2 Dacia Spring

3 Leapmotor T03

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1982 TALBOT SAMBA GL

Nascent PSA brand replaces decrepit Sunbeam with 'new' front-wheel-drive supermini that is really a rehashing of Peugeot's decade-old 104. Has some significant shortcomings but is "fundamentally an enjoyable little car which will appeal to many".

Price £4196
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1124cc, petrol
Power 49bhp at 4800rpm
Torque 63lb ft at 2800rpm
Weight 931kg
0-30mph 4.2sec
0-60mph 16.0sec
Top speed 95mph
Economy 37.3mpg

1962 RILEY ELF

BMC pushes its smash-hit Austin/Morris economy car upmarket with a plush, sporty, booted version. For £125 more than even the De Luxe Mini, "it does seem a pity that the larger engine from the Cooper Minis was not adopted, but the added refinements give real appeal".

Price £711
Engine 4 cyls in line, 848cc, petrol
Power 34bhp at 5500rpm
Torque 44lb ft at 2900rpm
Weight 802kg
0-30mph 6.9sec
0-60mph 32.3sec
Top speed 74mph
Economy 32.9mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk ★★★☆☆ 30.6.21 Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland ★★★★☆ 10.4.19 Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-
KGM					
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★☆☆ 14.9.16 Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-
KIA					
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★⯪☆ 11.9.24 No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2 ★★★★☆ 29.8.18 Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S ★★★⯪☆ 27.2.19 Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition ★★★⯪☆ 20.11.19 Looks good and drives well but lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban ★★★⯪☆ 5.7.23 Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3 ★★★★☆ 7.9.22 A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line ★★★★☆ 31.12.24 New-era Niro is rationally compelling but not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S ★★★⯪☆ 15.6.22 Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 9.10.24 Not the outstanding EV it once was but still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	–	2.9	227
EV6 GT ★★★⯪☆ 4.10.23 Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2 ★★★⯪☆ 20.1.21 Lacks polish, but its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S ★★★★☆ 31.1.24 Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220
LAMBORGHINI					
Huracán Performante ★★★★⯪ 11.10.17 Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD ★★★★⯪ 20.5.20 Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto ★★★★⯪ 4.12.24 New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus ★★★★☆ 3.7.19 Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-
LAND ROVER					
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★⯪ 10.2.21 A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE ★★★★☆ 8.1.20 Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury ★★★★⯪ 12.4.17 A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE ★★★⯪☆ 30.8.17 Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X ★★★★⯪ 13.5.20 World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE ★★★★⯪ 2.11.22 Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One ★★★⯪☆ 28.8.24 More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE ★★★★⯪ 13.7.22 A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
LEXUS					
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design ★★★⯪☆ 29.5.24 Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack ★★★★☆ 16.3.22 Interesting, refined and efficient, but not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport ★★★⯪☆ 22.3.23 Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi ★★★⯪☆ 6.2.19 Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
LS 500h Premier ★★★☆☆ 6.6.18 Limo has never been more appealing or less competitive in key areas.	5.9	5.3	2404	42.2	-
RC F Ultimate Edition ★★★⯪☆ 6.11.24 Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi ★★★☆☆ 7.2.24 MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-
LOTUS					
Eletre R ★★★⯪☆ 24.7.24 There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216
MASERATI					
Ghibli Diesel ★★★⯪☆ 12.3.14 Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo ★★★⯪☆ 18.10.23 A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel ★★★☆☆ 30.11.16 A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso ★★★⯪☆ 8.5.19 Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo ★★★⯪☆ 11.9.24 An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.25 Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo ★★★★☆ 16.10.24 Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-
MAZDA					
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav ★★★★☆ 22.4.15 The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport ★★★★☆ 6.11.19 Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech ★★★⯪☆ 10.3.21 Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line ★★★★☆ 19.2.25 Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav ★★★★☆ 28.6.17 Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-

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*For three weeks from publication date

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★⯪☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★⯪	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-
McLAREN								
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren’s mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★⯪	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider	★★★★⯪	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★⯪☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	
MERCEDES-AMG								
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★⯪	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★⯪	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★⯪☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn’t quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn’t quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★⯪☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-
MERCEDES-BENZ								
A200 Sport	★★★★☆	4.7.18	Luxurious and desirable but not good enough to drive to take top spot.	8.7	7.9	1375	56.7	-
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded ‘premium’ driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver’s car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★⯪	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★⯪☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★⯪	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn’t easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn’t notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	–	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49
MG								
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★⯪☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	25.11.20	MG’s second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS EV Exclusive	★★★☆☆	4.12.19	Practical, affordable MG fails to truly move the game on.	8.9	8.0	1556	-	113
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-
MINI								
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162
MORGAN								
Plus Four	★★★⯪☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six	★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist’s sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3	★★★★⯪	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler’s endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-
NISSAN								
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★⯪☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★⯪☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious but not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-
OMODA								
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★⯪☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-
PEUGEOT								
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-

TOP 3

BEST CHINESE CARS

1 Xpeng G6

2 MG 4 EV

3 MG HS

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line	★★★⯪☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line	★★★⯪☆	18.1.17	In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.	12.0	12.1	1300	53.2	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★⯪☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT	★★★☆☆	12.2.25	Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★⯪☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition	★★★★☆	12.2.25	Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235

TOP 3

BEST SMALL CARS

1 Renault 5

2 Renault Clio

3 Volkswagen Polo

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

PORSCHE

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★⯪	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★⯪	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Spyder	★★★★⯪	1.4.20	Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.	4.3	3.5	1350	30.1	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★⯪	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★⯪	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★⯪	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
911 Carrera GTS	★★★★⯪	5.3.25	Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
Macan Turbo	★★★★⯪	4.6.14	Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.	4.7	4.3	2050	30.9	-
Macan Turbo Electric	★★★⯪☆	19.2.25	Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	-	2.1	219
Cayenne S	★★★★⯪	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★⯪☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★⯪	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

RENAULT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★⯪	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
Mégane E-Tech Techno	★★★⯪☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★⯪☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★⯪☆	13.10.21	Showy styling clothes an eminently sensible but unspectacular car.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★⯪☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost	★★★★⯪	13.1.21	Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.	4.7	3.8	2490	28.5	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★⯪	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★⯪	19.7.17	Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★⯪☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.6 TDI Ecomotive SE	★★★★⯪	19.10.16	Former class leader for all the right reasons – desirability included.	10.5	10.3	1408	-	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★⯪	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★⯪☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	-	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★⯪☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★⯪☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★⯪☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★⯪☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★⯪☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Vitara 1.6 SZ5	★★★⯪☆	29.4.15	The Vitara is solidly built in Suzuki's image – and that's fine with us.	9.5	9.5	1124	-	-
SX4 S-Cross 1.6 DDiS SZ4	★★★⯪☆	30.10.13	Quietly capable in most respects and remarkable for its parsimony.	10.0	10.1	1305	67.5	-

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★⯪	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★⯪	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★⯪☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★⯪☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★⯪☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★⯪☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★⯪☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★⯪☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★⯪☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★⯪☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★⯪	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★⯪	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★⯪	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★⯪☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★⯪☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★⯪☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★⯪	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★⯪	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★⯪☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★⯪☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★⯪☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★⯪☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★⯪☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★⯪☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sister car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★⯪	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger brothers, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★⯪☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 D5 AWD Momentum	★★★★☆	17.6.15	A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.	8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★⯪	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Aston Martin Vantage Volante August
V8 fans rejoice! Rowdy sports car is dropping its top again.

BMW M3 CS Touring May
Bonkers estate gets 542bhp and a reworked chassis.

Citroën C4 April
It's facelift time, which mainly means new front and rear lights.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
HILLCLIMBS

You can get right up close to the racers, trackside and in the paddock

BY STEVE CROPLEY

I guess it helps that the very first motorsport event I attended in this country upon emigrating was a hillclimb – a short-course speed event for more than 100 disparate cars, all of which were given several chances to set their fastest time of the day.

It struck me immediately as the perfect form of amateur motorsport, since it took entries from new cars and old, road cars and racers, brilliantly skilled drivers and beginners. Everyone had the same chance.

Variety of machinery competing always sparks interest

> **"Skilled or beginner, everybody has the same chance"**

At the time, over 40 years ago, I couldn't afford a suitable car, but I still quickly discovered an advantage of this sport that endures: as a spectator, you can get close enough to the cars to peer into their engines and cockpits and chat with their drivers – usually their owners.

I acquired my first hillclimbable car, a yellow Caterham Seven Supersprint, in the late 1990s, when my rising competitive urge aligned neatly with another desire: to keep a 17-year-old son, just learning to drive, out of the ditch.

We did our first event together at Prescott, near Cheltenham, enjoying another of hillclimbing's advantages by double-driving the same car. Since then we've had five or six different cars, and most years we've done something together.

That first event also taught me that although you may feel exposed to the pitiless scrutiny of experts, nobody judges you.

You will invariably find the person you've parked next to is friendly, even if he or she is miles out of your league. I once parked my £12,000 Lotus Elise S1 next to a bloke with an Indianapolis Lotus single-seater, and he was the most down-to-earth person going.

The venues are nearly always beautiful. I like the short, sharp competition, not being much good at long bouts of concentration. I also like the pressure to make a perfect run: one slow gearchange off the start and you've had it.

What else? Well, hillclimbing is pretty easy on your car: you drive it absolutely flat but not for long, so you don't get home with ruined tyres and brakes. Any accident is your own, not the result of some Herbert appearing out of nowhere to knock a corner off your car. And there are loads of road car classes, so trailers aren't essential.

Just lately, I've developed an interest in electric motorsport. Short-course competition is ideal for battery cars, so EV racing is coming – and as much fun as my other kind. Time to embrace it.

What we did this week

RAINING CHAMP

I made a brief stop during our first drive of the Ioniq 9 in Korea at one of Hyundai's E-Pit rapid-charging stations, and it was a delight. Not only did it have a big canopy to protect users from the rain but also big screens showing the charge of every plugged-in car – great intel for anyone waiting. A simple idea well executed that makes a real difference.
JAMES ATTWOOD

PROPER CAPRI REVIVAL

A surprise email arrived from a graphics place in Birmingham. They explained that they were repainting a Ford Capri originally raced by Gordon Spice for fellow touring car star Andrew Jordan's restoration firm and wondered if we could supply a digital file of our 1980s logo. Of course we could, delighted to learn that the car's new owner is keeping the original livery bearing the wise imperative seen here.
KRIS CULMER

Autocar ...READ IT

SPEAKING MY LANGUAGE

The Alfa Romeo Junior Elettrica Veloce quickly ruled itself out of contention for victory in our recent fun EVs showdown, but I lived with the car for a week and came to really enjoy driving it, in spite of its flaws. The infotainment system would randomly switch languages throughout the day, too, which was exciting…
SERGIU AVRAM

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"Excellent"
★ Trustpilot

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SEAT ARONA
600 UOX
UK
No Ordinary Drive
Get £2,500 towards your finance deposit at 4.9% APR Representative* with Solutions PCP.

*With Solutions Personal Contract Plan. 18s+. Subject to status. Ordered by 31 March 2025 from participating Retailers. Indemnities may be required. Subject to changes in vehicle or equipment prices. May be varied or withdrawn at any time. Freepost SEAT Financial Services. Accurate at January 2025. Official fuel consumption for the SEAT Arona Range mpg (litres/100km) combined: 47.1 (6.0) – 52.3 (5.4). Combined CO_2 emissions 139 – 124 (g/km). Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption and CO_2 figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load. Data correct at 01/2025.